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DEATH UNDER GIBRALTAR

1. *Death under Gibraltar*

2. *Death under Gibraltar*

One *Death under Gibraltar*
reading

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

SPY

SECRET SERVANT

GERMAN SPY

Etc., Etc.

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UNDER GIBRALTAR

by

BERNARD NEWMAN

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANZ LTD

1938

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CHAPTER I

NOT TO EVERY man is given the thrill of reading his own obituary notice.

I had been giving a lecture to a suburban literary society, I remember, and as I walked into my flat the telephone bell was ringing—an irascible, persistent ring, betokening an operator whose patience is almost exhausted. I unhooked the receiver and the insistent high-pitched droning abruptly ceased. The conversation that followed began in edifying fashion.

“Is that you?” asked an unrecognised voice.

I agreed that it *was* me.

“Then you’re not dead?”

I agreed very definitely that I was not! “But who’s that speaking?” I asked, naturally intrigued.

“Clifton, you fool.”

I ought to have been more tactful, and found out by roundabout methods. Although the telephone does distort voices, editors expect theirs to be recognised. And Clifton was the Foreign Editor of the *News-Courier*, and a personage in Fleet Street. I had recently made a journey to Spain for him, observing the gathering of the storm.

“But what’s all this about my being dead?” I queried.

“Oh, a report has come in—you’re quite sure you’re not?”

“Absolutely! What’s it all mean?”

"Well, I've had a wire—oh, it's too long to tell you over the 'phone: I've rung you half a dozen times during the evening. Look here, the paper will be put to bed in half an hour. Come round, and I'll tell you."

I drove round to Fleet Street in lively curiosity. So far from being dead, I felt in extraordinarily good trim. I had travelled Spain energetically, on a bicycle, and the combined heat and energy had knocked three or four useful pounds off my weight.

Clifton was grinning hard as I entered his den.

"Yes," he observed, looking me up and down. "Yes, you're alive all right!"

"You sound as if you're rather sorry about it."

"Well, you've spoiled a perfectly good obituary notice—and a minor scoop," he said. "Look at that!"

He tossed a telegram to me, short and pithy. 'Body found Roncal Pyrenees believed Newman Englishman.' The telegram had been handed in at Pamplona, the capital of Navarre, I noticed.

"But what does this mean?" I demanded.

"I put a 'phone call through to Orio—he's our Pamplona correspondent," said Clifton. "Apparently a dead man has been found among the mountains somewhere, and has been identified as you!"

"But why—how?"

"Orio didn't know, but the police seem fairly certain. The British Consul at Madrid has already been notified. Orio knew that you'd worked for us, so naturally thought we'd be interested."

"But you knew I was back in London," I protested.

"I knew you were in London a week ago," he countered. "But that doesn't mean much with a restless beggar like you—you're quite likely to be in Timbuctoo to-morrow. So there was just a chance that you were dead. And nobody else would have known about it till the official report came in!"

"Sorry, but I'm not prepared to die just to give you a scoop!" I remarked. "Let's have a look at my obituary, anyway."

I picked it up from his table: he grabbed for it a second too late.

"No! You'll only get a swelled head," he said. "'The evil that men do lives after them'—what rubbish! Shakespeare could never have read an obituary!"

"'The *News-Courier* deeply regrets to record the death of its distinguished war correspondent, Captain Bernard Newman,'" I read.

"Oh, do stop!" Clifton pleaded. "You'll be asking for double pay if you finish it!"

But I read on. My modesty forbids me to reproduce the column here, but whenever I feel despondent and misunderstood I can always derive comfort from Clifton's beautifully-worded tribute. It pleased me so much that I began to read through it again.

"But what does it all mean?" Clifton demanded.

"I asked you that one," I replied.

"Why should a dead man be identified as you?"

"I've no idea."

"Were you robbed in Spain—could anyone have your passport or papers?"

"No. Definitely, no."

"Then how—look here, there might be a story here. I'll get on to Orio again, for more details. But, if it's necessary, are you prepared to go back to Spain? At once?"

"I must confess that I'm intrigued," I agreed. "I'd certainly like to see this chap who's supposed to be me. What a good chance to disappear, if I needed! Yes, I'm fairly free. I'll go, if you like. In fact, I'd like to. And as the job has such a personal interest, I won't sting you for extra fees this time—although I am your 'distinguished correspondent!'"

"Right! I'll get Orio, and give you a ring. You go and pack up—I'll reserve you a seat in the early morning 'plane from Croydon. You'll fly all the way, of course. Well, good hunting! Get something good—you've spoiled one good story by not staying dead, so find me another in place!"

I lay awake for hours; I was trying to think it out, but could discover no reasonable answer to the conundrum. Then I gave it up, and went to sleep. At seven in the morning that loud-tongued telephone bell began again. Not Clifton at the other end this time, but Marshall—Inspector Marshall, of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, companion in more than one of my little adventures.¹

"Ah, so you're not dead!" said Marshall.

"What—again!" I ejaculated. "I say, what *is* all this?"

¹ See *Spy, Secret Servant*, and *The Mussolini Murder Plot*.

"A body has been found in Spain, and identified as you——" he began. It is an interesting commentary on the efficiency of Fleet Street that the *News-Courier* received the news twelve hours before official communications deposited it at Scotland Yard.

"Yes, I know, but what is it all about?" I demanded.

"Oh, some silly mistake, I expect," he said.

"I'm not so sure. Anyway, I'm going to find out. I say, Marshall, could you run round? I'm off this morning. Spain is a queer place just now, and I've thought of half a dozen explanations of this mystery. Some are just comic, but one or two are serious. I'd like to tell you my ideas, then you can follow them up if I give the word."

"Right," he agreed. "I'll just wire Spain that it isn't you."

"Not on your life!" I declared: I was emphatic, though I scarcely knew why. "Leave that till I get there—and let's have a talk first." Eventually it was settled that he should drive me down to Croydon.

Clifton's instructions arrived shortly afterwards, with a substantial advance of cash—the *News-Courier* knows how to treat its 'distinguished correspondents.' My conversation with Marshall was lively. He thought that my journey was a waste of time and money—he had seen so many 'identifications' on the flimsiest evidence. But one or two of the potentialities I suggested sobered his judgment.

"When you get into trouble, just wire me," he suggested. "The Assistant-Commissioner thinks a lot of

you"—between Marshall and Clifton I would surely need a new hat—"and I'm sure he'd let me come out. But I expect this is going to be a joy-ride."

He was utterly wrong. The course of my life has strayed along many queer paths, seldom of my own choosing. I have had more than my share of thrills and danger—although by nature I am a mild-mannered man, content in quiet seclusion. Some of my previous 'exploits' were exciting enough, certainly, but I was to find that none of them was so incredibly fantastic as the weeks which lay before me. Never have I known such moments of tension—relieved by spells of intriguing and romantic interest.

Yet as the air liner droned its placid way over the Channel I was happy in my anticipations. Joy-ride it might or might not be, but fascinating this journey definitely was. For my mission was surely unprecedented. Dr. Thorndyke, Lord Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot—they had their absorbing tasks, solving their problems of unusual and unnatural deaths: but mine was unique—I had to investigate the mystery of *my own death!*

CHAPTER II

THE APPROACH TO a police problem differs vastly in Spain and England. In England, when there is trouble, you call in the police automatically, and hand over responsibility to them: in Spain you first make your enquiries about the political convictions of the chief of police. The chief of the *local* police, that is to say, for until recent years the Guardia Civil of Spain had a well-deserved reputation as a police force d'élite, on whose loyalty the Government could always depend. During the past half-dozen years, unfortunately, Spain has never been quite certain whether it had a Government or not, and the allegiance of the Guardia Civil has wavered in the face of conflicting public sentiments. When General Franco rose in armed revolt, its loyalty was violently sundered. While many civil guards supported the Government, their legal masters, others felt more strongly the claims of General Franco and his officer clan. Their action is not unnatural when it is considered that they were recruited exclusively from ex-non-commissioned officers of the army, and were directed by army officers.

The local police of Spain, however, were of quite a different category, and in my own experience they varied in efficiency from the outstandingly good to the utterly incompetent. The chief of police usually attained his

rank as the result of political patronage, and he in turn was seldom slow to allocate the best positions to his political friends. Even if the rank and file had little or no share in the graft involved, at least they could hardly be blamed for adopting the moral outlook of their superiors. Only the minority of the local police forces of Spain commanded the slightest respect, and people who valued law and order depended almost exclusively upon the ubiquitous civil guards. I am talking, of course, of the pre-civil war days—goodness knows what will happen to law in Spain once order is restored.

As I hurried to Pamplona I could make a fairly accurate guess as to the political outlook of the police force there, for Pamplona is the capital of Navarre, and Navarre is the last stronghold of Carlist opinion in Spain. In the civil war which even then—in the late spring of 1936—was ominously threatening, it was fairly safe to assume that Navarre would be involved in the revolt—although its aims might differ vastly from the rest of the rebels, it would fight against the common enemy and then argue about the spoils afterwards. History has often shown that this is a remarkably futile policy.

I do not know why, but Navarre has always been the centre of Spanish lost causes. I can appreciate most loyalties, but it is difficult to understand the mentality of people who are willing to give their lives for Carlist pretenders to the Spanish throne—which does not now exist! They can be compared to those misguided people who in England celebrate the anniversary of

'King Charles the Martyr,' and hold that Rupprecht of Bavaria, the last Stuart, is the rightful king of England.

(Incidentally, if I had been General Franco, I would have persuaded Navarre to come in on the other side. Since the Napoleonic Wars there have been more than a hundred military revolts or civil wars in Spain. Navarre has been concerned in most of them—and almost invariably has backed the losing side!)

I did not see the chief of police of Pamplona, but the superintendent to whom I was introduced reflected the atmosphere of the organisation. It seemed to me that he could scarcely be bothered with the mechanism of everyday crime: bigger things were afoot, and petty larcenies, robberies and even murders would soon be misdemeanours of minor account. Because I made a totally unauthorised use of one of Marshall's official cards, however, the Spaniard did condescend to give me such information as he had. Considering that the body had been discovered two days earlier, it was meagre enough. Two peasants driving their flocks towards summer pasturage in the Roncal valley of the Pyrenees had chanced across a body lying at the foot of a precipitous crag; it had apparently been lying there for some weeks, and not until it had been carried to the nearest village was any attempt at identification made. Then it was found that the clothes removed from the corpse were of English make, and in some of the pockets were found letters and other papers which indicated that the dead man was a British newspaper correspondent named Newman.

The local authorities had accordingly wired to the British Consul, who had passed on the news to Scotland Yard, and on receipt of Marshall's reply that a representative would be coming out to Spain, the funeral had been delayed so that the body might be inspected. It was now lying at Sanguesa, the superintendent said, where was the local district headquarters.

Although it was his case, he had not taken the trouble to go to the spot himself, and knew nothing more than was contained in the report forwarded to him. I hired a car immediately, therefore, and drove out to Sanguesa. The local inspector was at least a little more alive to his job—and it could scarcely be his fault that he had received no instructions about the body, so that it had been buried the day before! In those troubled days of Spain, however, strong-minded officers held regulations only lightly, and the inspector willingly agreed to dig it up temporarily that same evening.

In the meantime I could, of course, inspect the clothing which had been removed from the corpse. To my amazement I found that the tunic and trousers were indeed my own! When I am travelling in hot countries I usually carry with me a couple of suits in Indian drill, and this was definitely mine—my tailor's tab appeared inside the appropriate pocket. Further, a couple of old letters and a cablegram from the *News-Courier* definitely belonged to me. At least, therefore, the first point of the mystery was soon solved, but I racked my memory in vain to explain how my clothing should be discovered on a dead man. But I did at last recall that I had made

a present of an old tunic and a pair of trousers to a pitiable old man in Estella. I had considered them worn out, but they were in perfect condition compared with the miserable rags he was wearing. Yet this recollection did not help—for these garments very definitely were not the ones I had given away.

By moonlight and without ceremony a little party of diggers soon unearthed the rough coffin, and I prepared for an ordeal. The local doctor who had inspected the corpse on behalf of the police was by my side, and warned me that I must anticipate a nasty moment. He imagined that I was a relative of the dead man—this was the credible story I had adopted for present consumption.

I welcomed the stiff drink he gave me, for it was really necessary. The body was in a frightful state of decomposition; even in its fall it had been so battered that its features were completely unrecognisable. According to the doctor it must have been lying there for several weeks—how many, he would not profess to hazard an opinion, for the violent climate of the mountain valley might have assisted or retarded decomposition according to its mood. Nor had the wolves and eagles of the Pyrenees failed to appreciate this unexpected gift.

“But how did he die—were you able to discover that?” I asked.

“Oh yes,” the doctor replied. “At least there’s no question of that. He fell over a cliff which is two or three hundred feet high, but he was dead before he fell. Look,” and gingerly he turned over the head. “Look, that’s how he died.”

And he revealed to my unprofessional examination a great gash in the back of the skull—hideously brutal and savage.

“I warned you that it wasn’t pretty,” he said. “Yes, it’s fairly evident how this chap died. Somebody hit him suddenly on the back of the head with something heavy—a loaded stick, or something of that kind, and then threw him over the cliff.”

“So it’s plain murder,” I said.

“Absolutely,” he agreed.

“And have you been able to get on the track of anybody?” I turned to the local police inspector.

“What would you?” and he shrugged his shoulders. “In these days we have three or four murders a week, except that they aren’t called murders now. A Communist shoots a Fascist, and a Fascist shoots a Communist—apparently that isn’t murder, but just reprisal. Anyway, long before I can get to arrest the first murderer, somebody has already murdered him! How you can expect police to work under political conditions like these? No, I’m afraid I haven’t done very much—we’ve been absolutely overwhelmed. Of course, if you do identify this man as an Englishman, then we shall have to do something—the British Consul has been on to us every few hours already, though how he can expect us to do anything with no other clue than a decomposed body is beyond me. Well, señor, at least you can help us—can you identify this body?”

“Of course I can’t,” I replied warmly. “You must have known that I could not; but I do identify the

clothes. These did definitely belong to Captain Newman. I am certain of that."

"But if they're his clothes, surely the body is his," he persisted.

"Not necessarily," I said, "someone may have stolen his clothes."

"But where is this Captain Newman?"

"Goodness knows!" I hedged. "But he certainly was in Spain some weeks ago."

"Yes, I knew that; and, more than that, he was in the Roncal valley five weeks ago—about the time this must have happened," said the inspector. "I have been able to establish that without difficulty—he was seen at Isaba, at the head of the valley. I think it *must* be him. But why should anybody kill him? There is, of course, the motive of robbery. Only a couple of pesetas were found in his pocket. Yet I may tell you that robbery is almost unknown in the valley of Roncal—I don't know if you know it, but the men there are a tribe apart."

"Look here, inspector, it seems to me there are one or two things that only I can do. I can see that you're simply up to your neck in affairs, and I agree that you've got absolutely nothing to go on here. Now I know this fellow Newman very well; I propose to go to the place where I last heard of him, and trace his movements from there. If you would be good enough to give me a note to show to local police officers, asking for assistance when I need it, I think that maybe I could get on the track of him. Would it be improper to ask you to do this?"

"Not at all," he cried, obviously relieved. "That is, assuming you will tell the British Consul to stop worrying me!"

"Oh, you can leave that to me," I said, with due conviction.

Thus it was arranged, and I drove back to Pamplona. But the reader will be legitimately asking why had I acted like this? The body was not mine, had nothing to do with me, was merely wearing my clothes. My reply is that my course of action was dictated by a mixture of practical considerations and instincts. There might be a perfectly simple and logical explanation of the method by which my clothes were found on a body at the foot of a precipice. If so, within a very few hours or days I could return to England and there would be no harm done. But there was one grave possibility that troubled me, and impelled me to the fullest investigation. A man wearing my clothes had been foully murdered—supposing he had been murdered in mistake for me! This supposition, the reader will agree, opened up startling possibilities, and I would have been a weakling had I not decided to probe them to the full. I must confess, too, that even at this stage I had an inkling that all was not as it should be; probably the disturbed political atmosphere affected my outlook. When every man I met was troubled and anxious, not knowing what catastrophes might arrive on the morrow, it is clear that normal logical judgment becomes difficult.

After 'phoning the British Consul, I pressed on 'o Estella, an ancient city in a quiet backwater of Navarre;

a city which has seen more stirring times than maybe any other in Northern Spain. I had no difficulty in finding the ancient beggar to whom I had presented my discarded garments.

"Juan," I said confidentially, when I had led him to a table of a café and had bought him something to drink, "you remember that day two months ago when I told you to come round to my hotel, and gave you some clothes?"

"I remember it well, señor," he murmured. "How could I forget? I was very grateful to you—am still grateful."

"Then why do you not wear those clothes, Juan?" I continued, "for I perceive that you are still wearing the rags which you showed to me as evidence of your poverty."

He hesitated for a moment, then began to whine in pitiable accent about the hardness of life and the afflictions of God; but I cut him short.

"Look here, Juan," I said, "I'm not blaming you. When I gave you those clothes they were yours, to use exactly as you liked. If you cared to sell them, that was your responsibility—I don't mind at all."

Obviously relieved, Juan made his little confession—that, after all, he had grown used to his rags, which were worth nothing, whereas my clothes were worth four or five pesetas; accordingly he had sold them—to a travelling coppersmith who was passing through the town.

"A coppersmith—do you mean a gypsy?" I queried.

A. J. Collier 2106

"Certainly, señor; of course he was a tzigane; how could he be otherwise?" answered Juan.

Now I felt that I was getting warm. Such skin as remained on the body at Sanguesa was mostly bleached, but here and there on the shin (which had evidently been guarded from the sun by the body) were patches of skin of a darker hue; indeed, I had already suspected that the dead man was a gypsy or else one of those ethnic freaks or throw-backs which are frequently encountered in Spain—men or women with a strong strain of Moorish or even Negro blood in their ancient ancestry.

Juan rose to go, and I could see that in spite of my assurance he was still very uncomfortable; but there remained one point which it was essential to clear.

"You are quite sure, Juan," I said, gently; "you are quite sure that the clothes which you sold to the gypsy are the same which I gave you?"

"Of course, señor," he persisted. "Of course I am!"

But I saw the sweat gathering above his shaggy eyebrows, and knew that he lied.

"Juan," I said, "you must play fair with me. I forgive you in advance for anything you have done which you should not have done, but you must tell me the truth. If you do not tell me the truth, then you will come with me to the police station."

"No, no, señor," he cried, his apprehension only too obvious. "No, no, I have told you!"

"You lie!" I cried, changing my tone and rising so that I could stand over him in a commanding position. Fortunately the little street was deserted, and the café

proprietor had returned to his siesta after serving us with drinks. "You lie! You will tell me the truth, or it will be the worse for you."

A few minutes' bluster and threats yielded the required result. He was an old man who had begged his way for the last twenty or thirty years, and he was in no mental condition to resist my firmness.

"I meant no harm, señor, I swear I meant no harm!" he whined. "It was the gypsy—it was he who persuaded me."

"Persuaded you to what?"

"I showed him the clothes, and he wanted them. He said that the sun was hot as he tramped from village to village, and your beautiful clothes were just the thing for his purpose. But he would only give me four pesetas, señor—and I wanted five pesetas at least."

"I see," I remarked dryly. "You wanted to buy a share in a lottery."

"What would you, señor?" he protested weakly. "I have no hope except in these things. Then the gypsy tempted me; he said that the clothes had been good but were much worn. If I would get him a better suit, he said, he would give me six pesetas. So I came back to your hotel."

"The devil you did!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, señor, I wanted to see you—just to ask you. I knew that you had more clothes there—had you not told me that you had, by arrangement, received a parcel of clothes from England and were returning another parcel of worn and dirty clothes? I wanted to throw myself

on your generosity, but you were out. Then on your table I saw the parcel which you had packed for England."

"You old scoundrel!" I shouted. "Do you mean to say that you opened that parcel and took out another suit?"

"Yes, señor," he confessed. "But, señor, I put the other one back. It was an exchange, not stealing," he protested briskly.

I let him ramble on, not ill pleased at the amount of information I had accumulated in a single day. At least the elementary part of the mystery was almost solved.

"This gypsy, do you know him?" I asked, breaking in on his protestations of sorrow or justification. "What was his tribe?"

"Oh, I have seen him often. He comes through Estella at least twice a year to mend copper pots; he is of the tribe of El Manco."

"And where are their headquarters?"

"I do not know exactly, but I do know that they frequent the valleys of the Pyrenees. I have heard him speak of Aoiz and Burguete and Sanguesa."

"Very well, that will do; I will find him."

"But, señor, what will you do to him? For if you fling him into prison, assuredly he will denounce me, and the police will come for me as well."

"Have no fear, Juan; they will not fling him into prison! Look, you have not rewarded my generosity very kindly, but you are an old man, here is a duro for you—go and buy a share in a lottery, if that is your

only way of achieving hope; and here is another peseta for more practical use. By the way, there is no need to tell anyone of our conversation to-day. That is understood?"

"It is understood, señor," he cried, his eyes shining as I passed over the great cartwheel of a five peseta piece and its little brother. Morally he didn't deserve them, but his information had been valuable and might even be invaluable.

I had made considerable material progress, yet the mystery proper remained. A gypsy wearing my clothes had been murdered. Had he been murdered as himself, or as me? For my own peace of mind it was quite essential that the problem should be solved. If he had been murdered as himself, then I could pass on to others the task of revenge, which in this case was no more than justice. If he had been murdered in mistake for me—well, the problem was far more vital, for the people who had murdered him, discovering their error, might be tempted to make another attempt. In circumstances like these I am a great believer in the old adage about getting my blow in first.

Thus it was essential that I should solve the mystery of the murdered gypsy. How? Assuredly I could not leave it to the Spanish police. If I announced to them that the dead man was no Englishman, but a gypsy, almost inevitably they would fling up their hands and pigeonhole the case. Gypsies were such a nuisance, they would say, that whoever had killed this man had probably conferred some benefaction upon the community at large. Anyway,

they had far more important matters to bother themselves about just now. With a political riot once a week, how could they bother about a dead gypsy?

So my first decision was to say nothing at all. I was not thinking of the police, but of myself. If I were to announce that there had been a mistake of identification, and that the Englishman, Newman, was not dead, it would be an open invitation to the murderers to have another try. No, my obvious course was to undertake the investigation myself—I was at least confident that I could do it as well as the Spanish police. But to investigate the murder of a gypsy was no simple task. A policeman interrogating a gypsy goes scatty as he tries to find his way between the maze of lies, ingenuities and silences presented to him. A foreigner would be up against the same difficulties, except that the inventions would be even more elaborate. One obvious idea flitted through my brain—that there was only one way in which I could get at the truth—by turning gypsy myself.

Not that I had any special qualifications for the job. I had played many queer parts in my day, both on the stage and off, but it is considerably easier to impersonate Mussolini than the humblest of gypsies. For a moment I toyed with the idea of telephoning to Dr. Walter Starkie, the crudite raggle-taggle vagabond, who could have stepped into the part at a second's notice, and who, I felt sure, would have been intrigued at the job. Yet it would scarcely have been playing the game to have asked another man to stew in my juice. Nor was a strict impersonation necessary—if I could enlist the co-operation

of El Manco, the chief of the tribe of the missing man, then I would be half-way to success.

I made no move towards taking up my new part until I had located the gypsy camp. As, for obvious reasons, I did not wish to approach the police on the matter—and in any case they could have given me little or no information, so slack were their methods—it took me two days to find it. But there, in a little valley among the foothills of the Pyrenees, I walked on foot, pack on my back, towards an encampment of twelve or fifteen tents. They were primitive affairs, not unlike the English gypsy wikiups—cowskins spread over a triangle of poles, each wigwam housing a medley of gypsy humanity.

These tents, I had been told in the last village, were the home of El Manco—‘The One-Handed.’ The real name of the gypsy chief was Luis Fernández, an old man informed me, but a gypsy always prefers to be known by his nickname: the loss of a hand in his youth had presented an uncommon pseudonym to Luis Fernández.

CHAPTER III

WHEN I HAD reconnoitred the camp, and had confirmed that it housed the tribe of Luis Fernández, El Manco, I returned to the village. There were one or two gypsies in the streets, haggling and begging. One woman walked with a baby at her breast and a crowd of half-naked brats about her ragged skirts. I wrote out a short note to El Manco, and for the consideration of a few 'big dogs'—the colloquial Spanish phrase for pennies—she agreed to carry it to him.

Two hours later he was with me—an old man, with dark, gnarled features and commanding eyes: once he must have been very handsome. He greeted me with great politeness, for the names I had mentioned in my letter were impressive—I count more than one gypsy among my friends.

"And now, señor, what can I do for you?" he asked, civilly, as we sat over drinks.

"I do not know," I replied. "Maybe a great deal, maybe nothing. Or maybe I can do something for you."

"You have something to say, señor. Speak on—I can listen."

"Tell me, is there any man missing from your tribe?"

"How do you mean, missing? Some of my men, and some of their families, are touring the province, as we

always do. We are real *gitanos*, señor. Not for us the fixed roof or the miserable cavern. Yes, but a portion of my tribe is with me, yet I cannot say that anyone is missing."

"Listen. A man of your tribe passed through Estella two months ago. There he bought of an old man a suit of English clothes—a tunic and trousers in khaki drill. Does that recall him to you?"

"Indeed it does! We laughed at him a good deal. Francisco, his name—he was my nephew. El Aguila—the eagle—was his nickname; he was proud of it, for he loved the mountains."

"When did you see him last?"

"It must be five or six weeks ago, señor. He returned from Estella, and we laughed at his clothes. Then he set off again, but he should be back very soon. His wife will have her next baby in ten days, and he will be back then, for he is a good husband."

"And where did he go?"

"To Roncal, señor. He is fond of the mountains of Roncal: twice a year he goes there, to mend the pans of the valley."

"I am afraid your nephew will not return from Roncal," I said with due gravity. "He is dead!"

"Ah!" Never have I seen a sudden fatality so calmly received. I might have been announcing the death of a cat or of the King of the Cannibal Isles. "Well, death comes to us all. It is a pity he could not see his child. His wife will swear that she was warned of this—weeks ago she said that the child was turning in her womb."

"You take sad news bravely," I said.

"What would you?" The old gypsy held out his one hand expressively. "Who can defy fate? We gypsies live in close communion with nature, and know that we must bend to her whims. If a man is dead, what sorrow will restore him?"

"You do not ask how he died?"

"What does it matter to a man how he dies, if he is dead?" he countered. "Whether Francisco took the plague or fell off a mountain I do not know, but you say he is dead."

"Señor Fernández, your nephew was murdered!"

"What!" In a second his mood changed, his mask of nonchalance fell from him. "What is this you say, señor—Francisco murdered?" There was a rising fury in his voice. "Then you did well to come to me, señor. If death comes it must be accepted, but if it is brought by another, that is the hand of man, not fate. Blood demands blood. Tell me who killed my nephew, señor, and I will kill him in his turn. A gypsy's vengeance stretches to the end of the earth."

"I do not know who killed him—I want to know," I said.

"Ah! I see!" Again his mood of violence passed swiftly, and his voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper. "So that is why you came to me! Very good, señor: we are at one in this matter—you have only to command. But listen: you shall find the murderer, but I will kill him. Speak on, señor—I knew from our first moment together that you had much to tell me."

Gypsies are not the most trustworthy race, but the old man of the tribe—its *puro rom*—is often more stable than the rest. El Manco impressed me very favourably: in any case, I *had* to trust him if I hoped to move forward. Rapidly and simply I told him what I knew of the death of his nephew.

“So you see, señor,” I concluded, “we are indeed at one, as you said. You want to know the murderer of your nephew; I want to know the man who thought to murder me.”

“We are at one, señor. I am a poor gypsy, but you are a man of experience. Tell me your ideas.”

“I have to enquire into the death of a gypsy, and only a gypsy can do that,” I began.

“But, señor, such things are beyond me! I am not a policeman, and I know nothing of these other complications of which you speak.”

“I said that *I* had to do it. How can I move about Navarre—maybe about Spain—without question from any man? As an Englishman? No. As a Spaniard, in these days of turmoil? No.”

“You are right, señor. If you were only a gypsy——”

“*If*,” I repeated. “Why should I not be a gypsy?” He looked at me in open amazement. “Listen well, for this is my plan. You shall darken my skin—doubtless your women have the gypsy’s skill in herbs: you shall lend me clothes. I speak Spanish well, but have no *Caló*: consequently you must lend me someone to go with me, should it be necessary to talk with other gypsies. To Spaniards I will talk, but to gypsies I will be dumb.

In such fashion I can roam Spain as I please, and talk to whom I will."

"But, señor—you would do this? A gypsy's life is not your life!"

"I want to find who killed your nephew, El Aguila. I am going to find who killed him—no price is too high to pay."

"Then there is nothing to be said, señor." The old man rose with a natural dignity. "You will come to our camp to-night when the moon has risen. My women shall prepare the herbs. I will provide the clothes and your companion. You may be sure that I shall not fail you."

I was quite sure. As darkness fell, my veins tingled with the swift flow of their blood, impelled by an excitement I had not previously felt for many years. My adventures, or 'exploits'—as Marshall insists on calling them—had demanded a dozen changes of character. To an actor, as I was—for I had only become a 'distinguished correspondent' on Clifton's persuasion following the publication of my memoirs—most of them were simple enough, but my new part was the most intriguing of all. I should say that I did not regard the potential adventure too seriously. The chances were that the murder of El Aguila would not concern me at all. Maybe a few days—I resolved to make quite certain that the gypsy stain would wash off!

It was a fantastic scene. In a rough tent of dried cowskins I stood stark naked, while two old gypsy women daubed me all over with some weird concoction. They

assured me that it would come off. Not with water alone—though while I was a gypsy, naturally, I would not wash—but with sal-ammoniac added to the water. It would tingle, but would not harm.

“I cannot change the colour of your eyes,” one old woman whispered.

“I could change even their colour, but your own would never return,” the other said. “Keep your lashes down always, to hide the fairness of your pupils.”

The old, one-handed gypsy entered with an armful of filthy clothes. “These are the nearest I can find to your size,” he said. I donned them—a ragged shirt; trousers that were scarcely decent, and which came to a tattered termination half-way down my shins; a heavy jacket which might possibly have belonged to some Spanish *hidalgo* of the 'eighties or 'nineties; on my feet I wore no socks, but the jute-soled *alpargatas* of the region.

“Stars in the sky, who would have believed it?” El Manco ejaculated softly. “The mother who bore you would never have known you! Yet let me cut your hair—it is too regular.”

A few minutes later he was satisfied. The rest of his little tribe knew nothing about me except what they had guessed. Squatting about the camp fire, the chief of the tribe introduced me as an English *gitano* who had been stolen from his parents, so did not speak *Caló*. The story was rather thin, but did not matter here. Nevertheless, I was rather concerned to find that my pose was suspected within ten minutes by the younger spirits of the tribe. Of course, someone may have gossiped—the women who

stained me, or the one who carried my note. No, that was not a fair start—I would do better in another camp where no one knew me. I looked the part, I was confident, and had a superficial knowledge of Romany custom. But I hoped that El Manco would provide me with a capable and quick-witted companion! I broached the subject to him.

“I have been thinking of that,” he said. “This affair is important to me. As I told you, gypsy vengeance must be satisfied, otherwise the honour of my tribe and of me is stained for ever. Only you can find the murderer of El Aguila, that is obvious. Assuredly I cannot do it myself, and I would never trust the police—as you yourself said, if they knew that the dead man was a gypsy, they would do nothing. You *must* find the man who killed my nephew.”

“Yes, I want to,” I agreed. “But you said——”

“I know, I know,” he broke in. “Yes, you must have a companion, to aid you in your wanderings and your questionings. You acknowledged a debt to me, but my debt to you is far greater—I could never know peace again if my revenge remained unpaid. That is why, to help you in your task, I am going to trust you as I never trusted a *gorgio* before. As your companion you shall have one of the women of my tribe.”

“What?” I cried. “A woman?”

“A woman can go to places where a man may not pass,” he asserted. “A woman can beguile men, where a man’s strength has failed. The sight of a gypsy with his woman is normal, but a gypsy alone is unusual. If you went

alone or with another man, you might have to work, and suspicion would be aroused. Yes, it is best—I have arranged it all." ~~X~~

I was about to protest, but he was already beckoning to a girl on the other side of the fire. "Come here, Mitza!"

She came: a dark, good-looking girl, with flashing eyes—beautiful almost; it was pitiful to think that in ten or twenty years' time she would be a worn-out old hag, with ten to twenty children clustering about her. ~~X~~ She was small, for a gypsy, but her ragged dress could not disguise her lithe and shapely figure. She was well developed, as gypsy girls usually are; though she could scarcely have been more than sixteen, she was past the gypsy's marrying age. She radiated personality and life as she moved towards us at El Manco's call; her walk was the essence of natural grace.

"Mitza, this stranger is searching for a companion," said El Manco. "Look at him—do you like him?"

She looked at me shyly, stepping back to allow the firelight to shine on me.

"Yes. He is good," she whispered. "He is strong." There was no trace of fear in her voice—it is quite common for a gypsy girl to marry a man she has scarcely seen before.

"Yes, he is strong," the chief confirmed. "You must take care, for if he beats you, then you will know of it!" Then suddenly he turned to me. "Three hundred pesetas!" he said.

A gypsy must be mercenary, even at a moment of
Co

drama. It was a compliment he paid me—I was admitted as one of themselves. For a gypsy dowry is paid by the bridegroom to the bride's father—she is sold, if you will; but no gypsy would sell his daughter to a *gorgio*. Indeed, I had scarcely before heard of a marriage between a gypsy and a non-gypsy. The true Romany is a clannish soul, and as I turned to El Manco I realised his confidence in me must indeed be strong, that he should pay me the unprecedented honour of offering me one of the girls of his tribe.

I had some mental trepidations on my own account. I had but recently become engaged to be married—I have related in another book¹ how I came to meet Margaret. What would she think of this suggestion? She was no jealous girl, and knew something of the demands of unconventional adventure. In any case, I argued with myself, the girl was offered to me as a companion. Yet still I hesitated.

“Three hundred pesetas,” El Manco repeated.

“Two hundred,” I said, automatically—and thereby sealed my fate. For it was now inevitable that, after the usual haggling we should compromise at two hundred and fifty pesetas: and, that done, I could scarcely refuse the girl.

I ought perhaps to make my position clear. The hero in a Ouida novel would of course have indignantly rejected El Manco's suggestion. But, considering it from the practical point of view, it was a very good one. It is unusual to see a gypsy who has no woman to do his work

¹ *The Mussolini Murder Plot.*

for him—particularly his domestic work. Further, the one or two men of the tribe seemed to be dullards, quite unsuited for my task. A quick-witted girl of sixteen might be very useful.

I had some moral scruples. I am not a philanderer, and, as I have said, had a prior commitment in England. Nevertheless, my investigations ought to occupy no more than a few days, and, even if the proprieties could not be preserved, I might at least remain pure for that short period. Maybe, too, there was at the back of my mind some touch of inherited prejudice—after all, Mitza was 'only a gypsy girl.'

And when El Manco mentioned that Mitza was the daughter of the dead man, I hesitated no longer. I might ruin her character—I doubted this, for by the fashion of their lives gypsies are very broad-minded—but my interests were hers. She owed something to the memory of her dead father.

"Yet this is a pity," El Manco whispered to me. "It is very seldom that a *gitana* marries a *gorgio*—the rule of our tribe is very strict. I have maintained it all my life, but to-day is not an ordinary day, and the blood of El Aguila calls from the ground for vengeance. And I feel that there is some bond between you and me, a bond which I sense but do not understand. Some instinct within me prompts me to give Mitza to you, to help you to gain my vengeance. Yet this is a poor wedding for Mitza. Every gypsy girl dreams through her young life of her wedding and her wedding night. But alas, I have no feast prepared—there is but a young goat boiling in

girl, and intelligent. But you know that this is not an ordinary wedding? You have heard about your father?—you know why you have been given to me?—to help me find the man who killed him."

"Yes, I know," she said. "And I will help you. With you I shall not be afraid—you are so strong."

"I want to start on our journey at dawn. Shall we lie down and rest?"

Even in the darkness of the tent of rough cowskins I saw the querying flash of her bright eyes, but she lay down obediently.

In my turn I sought a comfortable resting place in the rags, lying gypsy fashion, stomach down, my head on my arm. Incredible though it may seem, I did actually sleep for an hour, till the fleas awoke me: surely one of the strangest wedding nights ever known.

At dawn El Manco was awaiting us.

"I shall lend you a donkey," he said. "You can move the more quickly. If you have to sell it, you must bring the money to me. I have packed a tent and some utensils for you—enough for a gypsy. So, *gorgio*, I trust you as I never trusted a *gorgio* before—bring me back the vengeance of my tribe."

As I prepared to move off, the awakening tribe gathered round in curiosity. I saw Mitza taking a casual farewell of her mother—I had noticed her the previous evening, when she had taken no part in things: she was pregnant, and her touch might have contaminated the feast. But now she came up to me, and from her stocking produced a wicked little dagger.

“Take my *churi, gorgio*,” she said. “Bring it back to me, stained with the blood of the man who killed El Aguila.”

I took the dagger, and mounted the donkey—Mitza, of course, was to walk beside me. My life has not been dull, but I never recall such a moment of thrill as that when Mitza and I set off into the unknown, side by side.

CHAPTER IV

THE DONKEY, a she-ass, was a sturdy creature—which was just as well, for I am a heavyweight. Nevertheless, her apprehension when she first saw me was apparent; the intelligent creature looked from me to Mitza and, knowing that I would ride and Mitza walk, rolled her eyes in despair. Then she lifted her head to the heavens and gave tongue—a husky voice, but not unpleasing. I christened her Tallulah on the spot.

We plodded along the pleasant valleys of the foothills of the Pyrenees. For a while Mitza was silent, but the gathering sun warmed her spirit; she poured questions upon me—who I was, and whence I came. At least she half believed her uncle's story that I was an English Romany—she could never believe that an ordinary Englishman would adopt this life and take a gypsy wife. I told her little about myself, if a lot about England. Not that I did not trust her—though I had not seen her twelve hours previously.

In the villages we made easy enquiries after her father. Our very credible story was that his wife was ill, and he was wanted. Sympathetic rustics overcame their inherited suspicion of gypsies and tried to establish the identity of the day when El Aguila had mended their pots and pans. As detective work it was elementary, but very definite and conclusive.

I knew the district in casual manner, but of course had no map; however, we could always ask our way from village to village. Mitza obviously had the nomad's gift of locality: she had accompanied her father twice on his tours, and remembered the country extraordinarily well. We must have covered very nearly thirty miles on the first day, and were following El Aguila's trail firmly.

We pitched our rough tent and Mitza gathered wood for the fire. Soon the pot was boiling merrily, and a chicken from the neighbouring village provided a tasty supper (Mitza had been amazed when I had given her two or three pesetas to buy the chicken—she had expected to steal it!) As I reclined by the fire, well-fed, I was surprised at my ease of mind. This was not a bad life, after all; the gypsy was the aristocrat of the road—his women were his servants. Mitza anticipated all my requirements; she had accepted her lot willingly, and was obviously happy. There must have been a thrill for her in his dramatic journey with an unknown husband.

I was pleased, too, at the way I had played my part. In every village I had been accepted without question as a gypsy, as a hundred suspicious glances had shewn. My misgivings fell away from me; I gathered confidence, too, from the surety of the trail we were following.

Again we packed up our tent at dawn; Mitza, despite the energy of her journey, slept but fitfully, while I lay thinking hard. I suppose some of my friends will be shocked at the 'revelations' I am publishing, but no man was ever successful in intelligence work and the observation of the proprieties at the same time. I liked Mitza:

I liked the courage with which she had plodded beside me. When I had offered Tallulah to her, she had indignantly refused.

She walked with the easy grace of the child of nature—a mannequin would have envied her carriage, perfected under a long apprenticeship of carrying weighty bundles on her head. Her eyes were large and dark, sheltered by long, black lashes. There was something attractive in the joy of life which permeated every moment and exuded from her. Even as she lay on the other side of the fire, her posture differed vastly from my own indiscriminate lounge. There was a natural grace about her reclining figure, yet suggestive of dormant but impetuous energy.

In my turn I had taken up the rôle of questioner. I could pass myself off as a gypsy to Spaniards, but I doubted my capacity to deceive other gypsies. So I made Mitza talk of the ways of Spanish Romanies—of their customs of birth or death, their songs, their joys and sorrows; she began to teach me their language—*Caló*, a strange, semi-international tongue of unaccountable inconsistency.

But on the second night our acquaintance suddenly ripened. In the late afternoon we were plodding along the valley when a violent thunderstorm burst over us. Within five minutes we were sodden, and the packages on Tallulah's back formed little pools of angry rain. Above us, on the mountainside, a rock cliff promised shelter, and we scrambled towards it. We were lucky to find a small cave, and while I unloaded Tallulah, Mitza rushed in search of wood not yet soaked.

I might have shewn up badly, but Mitza entered the cave first—to find it occupied by a snake of some size. It may have been harmless—the bigger species of Spain usually are—but I would have funk'd it, for I hate snakes. But Mitza grabbed it by the scruff of the neck, so to speak—just below its head—carried out the squirming serpent and hurled it to death over the cliff.

With amazing skill she persuaded the damp wood to light; there was plenty of smoke at first, but a gypsy does not mind any kind of fug. Gradually a bright blaze developed, and we were grateful for its warmth, for the hasty rain, following so suddenly the heat of the day, had chilled our bones.

The steam poured unhealthily from our clothes, and I took off my jacket and held it to the fire. Mitza approved, and, before I realised what she was doing, had slipped off her ragged frock and had spread it on a sloping rock: expansive petticoats followed. So for the first time I saw the body of the gypsy girl I had 'married!' I saw a smooth, dark, lithe figure, slender and narrow-hipped—almost the body of a boy. Yet for the moment my mind housed no sensuous thoughts; her action was sensible, and I removed my own clothes.

Then the thunder, which had given us preliminary warning, returned with redoubled force. Great fangs of lightning snapped at the trees in the valley, or played about the gaunt peaks. I saw fear in Mitza's eyes: gypsies, children of Nature, are more afraid of her wrath than the wrath of men. And here was Nature in her most furious mood. The deafening peaks of thunder reverberated

and re-echoed along the craggy valley, seemingly imprisoned inescapably within its narrow confines.

I saw Mitza edging towards me in her terror. I put an arm about her, and her eyes flashed with gratitude. With each violent tremor she clung tightly to me, her face buried in my expansive chest. Soon she was clasped closely to me, shielding herself from the terror of the storm.

The centre of the storm passed over us, and its violence decreased. The thunder died away, like the noise of a receding battle. Only an intermittent and feeble flash of lightning disturbed the dark valley. Below us floated a little cloud, driven into the valley before the fierce and sudden wind, and now unable to find a way out. Other and denser clouds overhead brought darkness to the valley an hour before it was due.

Mitza raised her face to mine.

"I have terror of storms," she whispered. "But I drew strength from you."

"I am glad," I said.

Long minutes of silence passed before she spoke again.

"You are very strong. It was easy to take strength from you. Your chest is hairy—that is a sign of strength in all men." Another long pause; then: "Tell me, do I not please you?"

"Of course you do, Mitza."

"Then why do you not take me? You are my *rom*—my husband. Yet for two nights I have been yours, and you have not taken me. Why?"

"I told you, Mitza, that ours was a strange companionship. We have to find the murderer of your father."

"I know, I know. But need we starve ourselves until we find him? Your blood may be cold, but I cannot gaze on your body and not feel the blood coursing through my veins. Why do you not look at me?"

"Mitza, I should have told you. There is a girl in England——"

"I care nothing for girls in England! You are mine—I am your *romi*!" She sprang to her feet, and the firelight made a picture of fantastic beauty in its playing upon her smooth, dark skin.

Just as suddenly she was on her knees again, close in front of me. Her full lips were kissing my chest; her arms about me in feverish embrace, she pressed her lips on mine: never have I known such a press of passion.

I am no prude or anchorite: I liked the girl, anyway. I could not recoil from this fierce embrace of a gypsy girl with fiery love reflected from every curve of her beautiful body. For a brief moment I resisted her; then my lips returned kiss for kiss, and my brotherly protecting arm tautened to a wild embrace.

Mitza slept soundly, but in the morning her youthful vigour was dominating. She sang as we tramped along the valley—songs of love and triumph.

"You are happy, Mitza?" I smiled, for her mood was infectious.

"Oh, I am happy, *rom*," she cried. From that moment she called me *rom*—husband or lover; her tongue halted at the gypsy version of my own name.

"To-day ought to be interesting," she said, an hour later. "I recognise those mountains—do you?"

"Yes," I answered. "In another hour we shall be in Roncal. There our real quest begins."

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In another book¹ I have described the romantic valley of Roncal, tucked away in the north-eastern corner of Navarre among some of the wildest mountains of the Pyrenees. The valley is inhabited by a Basque tribe which is unique, for it traces its ancestry back to Noah: after the flood, it will be remembered, Noah's son, Japhet, himself had a son, Tubal; he, if popular legend may be credited, decided to wander away from the weary wastes of Armenia, and eventually with his family settled in the Pyrenees. According to ancient beliefs, Roncal was the valley which he chose as his future home—and, indeed, he might have chosen worse. His descendants are the people now known as Basques, and the people of Roncal are the very essence of that strange and fascinating race.

The descent of the Roncalais from Tubal may be legendary, but the outstanding character of the men of the valley is history. From the earliest times, ever since records began, the men of Roncal have been renowned for their valour in battle and their upright life. In the wars against the invading Moors, time after time the armies of Navarre broke back the waves of invaders, and the men of Roncal were always in the van. There came the day when the greater part of Navarre was subdued by the overwhelming Moslem masses, but not Roncal—

¹ *I Saw Spain.*

that always survived as a Christian community. In the wars of liberation again the men of Roncal were the spear-head of the Christian attack.

In those days it was customary for a monarch to confer the honour of knighthood upon any man who bore himself in battle with unusual valour, but Garcia Ximinez, King of Navarre, found himself confronted with a rare problem—how should he choose between these hundreds of gallant men? His decision was wise—he knighted them all, and granted an omnibus patent of nobility to the valley, so that every man had the right to bear arms, to have his own quarterings and all the trappings of nobility. This was some time ago—in A.D. 720, to be exact.

The men of Roncal to-day are worthy descendants of their gallant forefathers. I have visited their valley more than once, and have been charmed—not by its natural, picturesque beauty, although it is exceedingly pleasant, but because of the character of its people—a fine, virile race of men and women, sturdy and clean living; not great of stature, but of vigorous strength and indomitable will. They are almost unique among the Basque tribes, too, in that they still retain their ancient costume; it is picturesque but practical. On the feet are the jute-soled *alpargatas* which are universal throughout the Pyrenees; next come substantial woollen stockings; then there are grey breeches tied about the knees with coloured tape and encircled at the waist by a wide, purple cummerbund; a white shirt and a long waistcoat serve as support for a copious black cloak which can be flung

over the shoulder or draped round the body as the weather dictates. A skull cap is almost invariably worn, and the costume is completed by a felt hat of the type favoured by English clergymen. The costume of the women is just as picturesque.

Maybe it was the mention of Roncal in the first report of the tragedy I was investigating that first aroused my interest. Certainly my heart was warm within me as Tallulah trotted briskly along the road which penetrates the valley. Once I almost forgot my part, indeed, for in the village of Roncal itself I passed the house where I had stayed, and saw its family at the door. In my pleasure at seeing them, I called out greetings, forgetting for the moment that I was no English visitor but instead a gypsy pedlar. Fortunately my disguise held good, and redeemed my impetuosity. They stared hard at me, but in correct manner refused to acknowledge the salutation of a gypsy.

Nevertheless, fearful lest I might be recognised by one of my many friends and acquaintances in Roncal, I left to Mitza the task of identifying the place where the body of 'the Englishman' had been found. This she accomplished without any difficulty, and the present of a few pence was sufficient to persuade a shepherd boy of Isaba to tramp along the valley and point out the fateful spot.

"It was here that he fell," he said. "I know, for my uncle was one of those who found him. Look—the ground is still stained with his blood."

This was true, for the thunderstorm of yesterday had in its erratic course missed this spot. "They said

that he fell from that crag up there," he continued, pointing upwards a hundred feet or more.

He hurried back to his sheep, and we tethered Tallulah gypsy fashion—by tying one of her hind hooves to one of her fore; then we climbed by a craggy path to the mountain shelf above.

"The boy was right," said Mitza. "Look, here are more stains of blood! Yes, this indeed is where my father was foully struck down."

"No," I said, as my eye roved about the spot. "That cannot be—for, look, here are signs of blood on the rock *above*; he must have fallen here, and *then* dropped down below." No wonder that his features had been battered out of all recognition!

Again we climbed, another forty or fifty feet—a difficult ascent; one in which El Aguila would have delighted. It led us to a broader shelf, where one or two rough shrubs had found an insecure foothold in the thin coating of earth. Here the tragic signs were only too obvious—splashes of blood were small but clear. Had the police not been so occupied with political assassinations, at least they would have had no difficulty in ascertaining the site of the murder.

"Well, and what do we do next?" asked Mitza, after we had surveyed the scene.

"I am wondering," I said. "I am trying to reconstruct the scene. Your father was here, and someone came along and struck him. He must have had no suspicion. El Manco tells me that he was a strong and powerful man, and he would never have died without a fight

unless taken unawares. That means that he must have approached the murderer, or the murderer must have approached him, without arousing any suspicion or fear within him. That is fairly obvious. But I am not quite certain what to do next."

Then I chanced to glance down at the ground, and saw to my surprise that my jute-soled *alpargatas* had left a faint though distinctive impression in the soft earth.

"Look, Mitza," I said, pointing it out. "If there has been no rain since your father was killed—it is only a few weeks ago and the traces of blood are still evident—then we may find his footprints and those of the other man. Search carefully; you take that side and I will take this, but keep your own feet on the rock so far as you can."

It was Mitza's quick eye which first caught sight of the clue which was to prove so valuable.

"Look," she called out. "Here is something strange."

I hurried to her, and she pointed to a single heel mark in a tiny hole in the rock which was filled with earth. The mark was by no means sharp or distinct—it looked as if the front of the heel had failed to find the necessary purchase on the edge of the hole, so that the heel had slipped back in it. But one thing at least was clear—this imprint was made by no *alpargatas*, but by a shoe adorned by a rubber heel.

I sat down and tried to think this out. Men of Roncal do not wear rubber heels—I doubted if I would find such a thing in the whole of the valley. Not that I expected a

man of Roncal to be the murderer. I made such measurements as Marshall would have done had he been there—I would have preferred a plaster cast, but had no materials with me. I did, however, cover up the hole with a large piece of rock so that the print might be preserved for future police action.

"We are moving, Mitza," I said, for, indeed, this case was becoming clearer in that I was gradually accumulating clues which any efficient police force ought to follow to their origin. Had Marshall been available I would willingly have handed on the job to him.

"But where was your father going, Mitza?" I asked. "I have almost lost my bearings. From Isaba we ascended the valley of Velaqua, and then we began to climb. But where does this rough path lead? I know of no village beyond it. Why did your father come this way? Was it just his love of the mountains?"

"I do not know," Mitza replied. "But I know where this path leads. Once my father took me along it, and I was very frightened."

"Frightened? Why?"

"Because it leads to the Valley of the Shadow."

"The Valley of the Shadow?" I echoed. "That sounds a gloomy, deathlike place, Mitza."

"It is," she whispered. "It is very frightful. Do you not know it? But no, few people do. It is kept a secret."

"But why?" I insisted. "Tell me more about this valley. I must know."

"I only know what my father told me, and I only know that strange people live there."

But, pressing her, I could obtain no information of practical value at all. However, my course was obvious—I would press on to the Valley of the Shadow, sombre though its name might be. If it were so desolate, maybe El Aguila had been murdered because he attempted to penetrate its secrets. Yet how could that be, since he had already previously journeyed thither?

Mitza was obviously alarmed at the prospect of the valley, but her trust in me was very touching. Steadily we clambered along the rough goat track until we must have attained a height of five or six thousand feet.

Then, almost without warning, we found ourselves on the brink of one of those gorges which are a feature of the western Pyrenees. It was just as if a giant finger had scooped away a huge cleft of the mountain side, for two thousand feet below us the cliff was at first sight almost sheer.

"Yes, this is the way," Mitza whispered. "I remember this great dark cliff—down below is the Valley of the Shadow."

Certainly it was well named, for the valley was narrow and its cliff-like walls were so high and vertical that only when the sun was high in the heavens could the valley get any direct light. Even now, late in the afternoon, it was dark and gloomy, and from our position of vantage nothing more than a dull haze was distinguishable in the depths of the valley.

Nevertheless the track, though rough, was unmistakable, and in little more than an hour we had slithered

and scrambled to the bottom of the gorge, and were following a little stream along the floor of the valley. All about were high cliffs and great mountains; the grass scrub of the valley was scanty and coarse, as though deprived of natural sun. I was surprised when I heard a sheep bell beating through the gathering gloom—it seemed almost incredible that sheep, however hardy, could find sustenance in this desolate spot.

But where there are sheep there will be a shepherd, I argued, and I turned away from the obvious track to find him. Mitza by this time was so terrified that she had lost all sense of direction, except she could not remember having passed this way; of course she was only a child at the time, but it was her terror rather than her memory which failed her.

We reached the flock of sheep, but I found the shepherd asleep in a rough shelter, with his face to the ground. He woke as I stood beside him, and slowly turned over. And then I saw his face; it was more like an apparition; it wore a look of terror as the man saw me there. But it was not this that engendered my horrified amazement. The face was a freak of which nature might be ashamed; small, bright blue eyes were sunk in enormous sockets; of eyebrows and lashes he had none; it seemed as if he had no lips—that his mouth was but a straight slit. One physical feature seemed to fade into its neighbour; except his nose, which was of enormous size, with distended nostrils. Small tufts of white hair grew around his head; his complexion was horrible; it was as if his flesh were devoid of skin.

Quickly I mastered my horror and questioned him in my gentlest tones, but he could not control his fright. I heard some incoherent mutterings, but suddenly he bolted past me, running down the mountainside with inspired speed. In the valley below I saw him collapse with excitement or exhaustion. When he picked himself up and staggered along with spasmodic steps, I noticed his direction and called to Mitza to follow.

“What does this mean?” I asked of her.

“He is one of the men of the Valley of the Shadow,” she whispered, and if she had added ‘of death,’ the words would have been appropriate.

Who was this strange man? Then another point struck me—the few incoherent ramblings were not in Basque or even in Spanish—he had spoken in French. It was a strange dialect, true, but nevertheless French. This was surprising, but no more, for the French frontier lay only two or three miles to the north.

We pressed on. The valley turned eastwards towards the mighty peak of ‘The Three Kings,’ rising to the sky. I caught the excitement of impending events. I lengthened my stride, and Mitza almost trotted to keep beside me. Within twenty minutes we had reached an extraordinary scene.

Directly facing us the mountain slope was steep and rocky. Gathered about the cliff face were many lean-to shelters roughly built in the native stone; most of them appeared to be in a state of ruin; there were great holes in the walls. Once an outer wall had collapsed, leaving the roof incongruously sticking out from the mountainside.

It was a scene of utter desolation—as if I saw a dead city; yet those whiffs of smoke betrayed life.

And at the foot of the cliff I saw my shepherd. He was surrounded by a small group of people with terror written on their faces. Again ‘faces’ does not seem to be the right word to use. Their appearance was revolting, frightful, unnatural. Of what did they remind me? Ah, a colony of lepers. I wondered, was that the explanation? I was appalled as I noticed their throats—every one was wickedly swollen with goitre.

Before I could further collect my thoughts, they had seen us. Some, with shrieks of terror, rushed to their primitive huts; others, as if chained to the ground, moved not at all, their tiny eyes glowing with sullen apprehension. I was nonplussed. How was I to approach them?

We had now gained the group—half a dozen of these strange creatures, men and women. Very gently I began to talk, asking simple questions; but so great was their terror that they did not reply. I spoke in French, and they seemed to understand with some difficulty; at last one old man began to murmur casual sentences, and as I remarked the idioms he used, sudden recollections of old studies crossed my mind. Yes, this was French, but archaic French—the French of centuries ago. So the proximity of the frontier was no explanation!

I tried Spanish, too, and found that the old man at least understood it fairly well. He was gradually gathering confidence as he saw that I meant no harm. I talked to him of El Aguila, who must be known in the Valley of the Shadow. I pulled Mitza forward, despite her terror,

as one who had been to the valley years before. One of the women recognised her, and from that moment the atmosphere was easier.

At last, in one brief but illuminating phrase, the old man gave me the key to the riddle. Referring to his people, he called them Cagots.

"What, you are Cagots?" I cried. "But the Cagots were supposed to have died out centuries ago."

"No, we did not die," he said with a strange melancholy. "We are waiting to die."

My mind was searching back to student days for information about the Cagots. I remembered that they were a strange tribe who were found in southern Gascony; some said they were of Moorish descent, others said that their forefathers were lepers. From the time of known history they were already a dying race; they were outcasts—they even entered churches by separate doors; to this day in the French Basque provinces you will find churches which still have a 'Cagot door.' During the service, in those olden days, the Cagots were separated from other worshippers by a rail—and the holy water of the sacrament was handed to them on the end of a stick. Their very touch was held to be infectious, and they were even forbidden to walk along the road barefooted. I remembered, too, that the Cagots were involved in the Albigensian persecutions, and that hundreds of them were ruthlessly massacred. From that date they almost disappeared from history, and it was assumed that the ill-fated race had practically died out. An unhappy Basque mother from time to time gives birth to a throw-back,

or 'sport' from those ancient days—a cretinous freak of nature scarcely fit for the gaze of human eye. Most of these cretins die in their earliest infancy, which is just as well.

So much was history; but it did not explain the presence of this little tribe here—they appeared to number twenty or thirty people. At this stage, however, I may as well complete the miserable story of the Cagot survivors—I did not get it from the old man, who was the natural leader of the tribe, for his knowledge and intelligence were hopelessly inadequate. It was at neighbouring Roncal that I forced out the explanation that I needed. ~~X~~

At the time of the Albigensian persecutions, apparently, a small remnant of the Cagot race remained, and decided to find a safe retreat from political and religious strife. At that period, as I have mentioned, Roncal had a high reputation for valour; the leader of the Cagots, therefore, offered their people to the Roncalais as slaves, provided that they should be shielded from the outside world, until their race was extinct.

This was in the year 1252; then they numbered nearly a thousand people; now there are only just over thirty of the Cagots left, and the next generation consists of four boys and one girl!

For seven hundred years the Roncalais have fulfilled their obligation; they did not use the Cagots as slaves, but as servants. The Cagots have shepherded their flocks, and the Roncalais have protected them. There is no approach to the Valley of the Shadow except through Roncal, so protection has not been difficult. I found that

even in Roncal knowledge of its unhappy dependants was limited to the headmen of the valley and such hardy roving spirits as found their way by chance into the valley. They were immediately sworn to secrecy, and no outsider except an occasional travelling gypsy was ever known to penetrate to this mysterious region.

Although still staring at us with apprehension, the little group had at least decided that we meant no harm, and the old man led us towards those appallingly primitive stone huts and caves which served the people as dwellings. He was easily the most intelligent of the tribe. I found that he preferred to speak the native tongue of the Cagot rather than the Spanish which was essential for intercourse with the Roncalais. I followed him with some difficulty as he rambled on in archaic French—the French of the thirteenth century.

By this time it was almost dark, and I asked the old man if we might stay the night in the valley. He had no option but to agree, for the journey along the precipitous path would have been impossible in the darkness. He indicated to us an empty stone hut. There, he said, we might stay—its occupants had died some years before. Food would be sent to us—evidently there could be no question of free intercourse with his tribe.

It was going to be difficult for us, but I felt in my bones that the clue to the mystery lay in this unhappy valley. Fortunately, when the two or three younger men of the tribe had brought home their sheep, their curiosity overcame their terror. Mitza, now overcoming her fright, built a fire outside the hut with her usual skill, and, as we

sat beside it, the younger men of the valley approached hesitantly, followed by the old headman. I offered them cigarettes, and they took them automatically—yet had not the faintest idea what to do with them!

Then I began to talk—the most difficult cross-examination I ever made. Soon, however, I saw that the intelligence of these people was so limited that they could not describe anything to me. I must find the right question, or otherwise I would never get at the truth ; of imagination, at least, they had none. Maybe I ought to make my point plainer. If Marshall had asked me about a man coming along the road, I would have said: 'Oh, yes, he was a tall man, fair-haired, wearing glasses and a blue overcoat,' or something like that; but from people with such childlike minds and utter lack of knowledge of the world, I could never expect an answer of that kind. To get the same information I would have to ask a dozen questions. Was the man tall? Was his hair dark? Was it fair? Was he wearing a coat? Was it black or was it blue? Or was it grey? And so on. Even then the interrogation was more difficult than it seemed, for I found that to these people many things were no more than names—for example, they had no idea of colour, and one man described the grass as blue.

I did soon discover, however, from the old headman that they knew of the death of the 'Englishman' on the other side of the pass. What an Englishman was he had not the faintest idea. It would be wearisome if I were to detail all the questions I asked—simple questions, carrying my enquiry forward a stage at a time, with nine

questions out of ten a sheer waste of time. Approximately I adopted the attitude of a barrister interrogating a stupid child witness in a juvenile court. It took me a good hour to elicit the one solid piece of information I required—that the dead man had been seen by one of the men of the Valley of the Shadow on his tragic journey—the man had actually seen him fall to his death!

The man was sick, said the old headman, but he agreed to take me to his hut. There, on a bed of old blankets and sacks, lay a middle-aged Cagot with the hand of death heavy over him: his intelligence was even less than the average, and the first question I asked, although assisted by supplementary explanations from the old man, brought no reasonable response.

Then I reverted to the method of statement and trial and error. My first attempt evoked no promptings of the unhappy man's memory, but at last I struck a line of thought—based on the trifling discoveries or deductions I had already made—that brought welcome news. I will not detail all my questions—they must have run into the hundreds; but, greatly simplified, I drew out the information in this fashion.

“Now, many weeks ago you walked up the gorge and over the mountains?”

“Yes,” the man agreed.

“And on the crest of the pass you saw a man approaching?” I will omit his grumbled agreement and also my questions wide of the mark. “You did not know the man? He wore strange clothes? He was climbing by the goat path from the valley of Roncal? Halfway up the mountain

he stopped to rest; then did another man come up the path following him? And the strangely dressed man did not move away? This other man was carrying a stick was he not? Was he a tall man, or was he a short man? Was he dressed in clothes like mine?"

And it was at this stage that the dying Cagot made his first intelligent remark—his first break from a monotonous succession of 'Yea's and nay's.'

"He was a man of Roncal," he whispered.

"A man of Roncal? Are you sure?" I cried, for it seemed to me incredible—impossible that a nobleman of Roncal, of such high tradition, should so foully murder an unsuspecting victim in cold blood. But, yes, said the Cagot, he was quite sure that it was a man of Roncal.

"Did you know this man?"

"No."

"Had you seen him before?"

"How did you know that he was a man of Roncal?"

This simple question flabbergasted him, so I asked it in half a dozen simple parts, to discover that the man with the stick had definitely worn the costume of Roncal.

I persisted in my questioning, pulling myself up frequently as I realised that my questions were too involved. But gradually I elicited a full if simple description of the actual murder. El Aguila—'the Englishman,' of course, in my interrogation—had been resting on the little mountain shelf which we had traced. He had heard footsteps below, and had got up to look who was coming; when he had seen that it was a man of Roncal,

he had returned to his place and had sat down again. Then the man of Roncal had approached him suddenly, and, before he could turn, had hit him with the stick, and El Aguila had fallen over the mountainside.

In spite of the appalling mentality of the man, I was amazed to find that he had done nothing; he had never thought of going to see if help could be given to the fallen man—though, goodness knows, that was impossible enough!—nor had he thought of giving information about the murder when at last the story had filtered through to the Valley of the Shadow. When, vastly intrigued, I tried to bring out the reason for his silence, his answer was simple but emphatic. “It was a man of Roncal,” he said.

The explanation was good enough. To these unhappy Cagots the men of Roncal are almost of the stature of angels, and can do no wrong. How should a man criticise his protector? How should these Cagots, who are still living in the thirteenth century, know anything of modern ideas of right and wrong?

By this time the night was far advanced, and I was utterly exhausted with the mental strain of the questioning. At least I was satisfied in its result, however. To-morrow we would return to the valley of Roncal to follow up the clues we had gained.

Mitza clung closely to me as we lay down in the stone lean-to hut which was our home for the night.

“I do not like this place,” she whispered: “there are devils in the trees; it has an atmosphere of death about it.”

And, although I am by no means a nervous man, I had to agree with her that I should not be sorry to be clear of the Valley of the Shadow. So intense was its foreboding influence, indeed, that I did not sleep. Mitza dozed fitfully, until aroused by cries from a neighbouring hut.

The cries resolved themselves into human voices singing; so weird a song I have never heard. Did you ever hear those plaintive songs of the Hebrides, sung by their own people? Imagine their sad appeal intensified a hundredfold, and you know the song we heard. A woman was singing; the air was like a sustained musical sob. The others caught up a refrain; I hardly heard words, but it was easy to sense their meaning; I never heard such a wail of desolate sadness; every note seemed to rend a heart-string. I heard Mitza sobbing beside me.

“What does it mean, Mitza?” I whispered. “This wail—this wail akin to death.”

“It has frightened me before,” she said. “This is the way they celebrate a birth in the Valley of the Shadow. They laugh with joy at a funeral and wail with despair at a birth.”

This I could at least understand, for no joy of human emotion can thrill the Cagot mind. They do but endure the pangs of a long-drawn death; happily, births are few, for the race is almost sterile. Within two or three generations—maybe one—the Cagots will be no more.

As the plaintive wail continued, Mitza sobbed in her fear and her sympathy, and although I am alleged to be thick-skinned, I cannot deny that tears were never far

from my eyes throughout the short summer's night. I have travelled a good deal, and can claim to know the world, but never in all its primitive corners have I chanced across a people so unnaturally miserable and so righteously glad to welcome death. The man was right who christened their home the 'Valley of the Shadow.'

CHAPTER V

So OVERWHELMING was the gloom of the Valley of the Shadow that for many hours the following morning my mind refused to continue its tussle with the puzzle confronting it. Mitza led the way, and set a merry pace as she ascended the steep cliff at the end of the gorge. Relief showed in her expressive eyes as we gained its crest; a gypsy girl of sixteen is always sophisticated, and is usually the mother of one or more children, but Mitza had still many of the instincts of a child. Gypsies, like all simple folk, are always afraid of what they do not understand. Certainly I could appreciate Mitza's terror in the Valley, for those miserable Cagots aroused other sensations than pity within my own mind. Most normal people are like that: they are sincerely sorry for folks smitten with fell disease, but are also rather afraid—would rather keep apart.

I took one last long glance at the Valley of the Shadow.¹ Even in the morning sun its depths were mysteriously sombre—the atmosphere alone of the place was unnerving. Then we set our faces to the west, and forgot the gloom behind us.

¹ I have deliberately refrained from revealing its position too accurately, lest it should be invaded by sightseers, however well-meaning and anxious to help, who would inflict fresh mental torment on its hapless inhabitants, who only want to be left alone, and to die in peace. Medical friends who have studied the occasional 'sports' born in the Basque provinces tell me that nothing can be done to alleviate their miseries, and that death is indeed a release. B. N.

Mitza struck up the song of the road with which she lightened her march. I began to think furiously. The jigsaw puzzle was taking shape—Marshall, I felt sure, would have been pleased with the case. Yet its vital piece was still missing. Had El Aguila been killed as himself or as me? If as me, why should a man of Roncal want to kill me? I was known in the valley as a friend: I had written about its noblemen in generous terms—my article had recently been reproduced (without permission or fee!) in the Navarrais newspaper which circulated in the district. There was no question of robbery—the murderer had not descended to the body, the Cagot had said. I found it hard to believe that any Roncal man should want to murder me. Indeed, I found it hard to believe that any Roncal man should kill anybody in such treacherous fashion, so contrary to the character of the valley.

What to do next? I suppose that by long if casual enquiries I might have achieved my aim, but now that the crime was becoming clearer its urgency oppressed me. I must *know* what lay behind it. I knew one method by which I could find out all that Roncal could tell in the space of a few minutes. It was an incongruous method, but I adopted it.

When I had previously stayed in Roncal, I had made my headquarters at Isaba. An innkeeper there, Don Angel Garcia, had become almost my friend—had delighted me with his tales of the valley of noblemen. Don Angel was old, one of the elders of the valley; he had dignity and character, and certainly he had knowledge.

I guessed that he was one of the anonymous protectors of the Cagots. I knew I could trust him implicitly.

As I entered his inn, he looked at me sourly—gypsy custom is not welcomed; even with friends they are confirmed kleptomaniacs. I had left Mitza outside the village with Tallulah, who had greeted us with noisy protestations of affectionate welcome. I put down my money as I called for drink, then whispered: “Don Angel, I want to speak to you—privately.”

“What is it?” he asked with some suspicion.

“A matter to your profit.”

He hesitated: need I say that Roncal, adjoining the French frontier, is a centre of smuggling activities? I am not going to guarantee that even Don Angel in his day has not been concerned in some illicit enterprise.

“Come in here,” he said, and led me into a small room. “Now, what is it?”

“You remember that Englishman who was killed here a few weeks ago?”

“Yes, I remember him well”—and I was proud to notice a shadow of sorrow cross his face. “I knew him well. What about him?”

“Who killed him?”

“How should I know?”

“A man of Roncal killed him!”

“What!” he roared. “You filthy *gitano*, I’ll wring your neck if you say that again. Murder is not a sport in Roncal—and Señor Newman was our friend. It is much more likely that he fell a victim to one of your thieving tribe.”

"Gently, Don Angel. Suppose he were not dead?"

"Why suppose, when we know he is?"

"But he is not. I say it, and I know."

"What? Then where is he?"

"Don Angel, will you swear to keep secret what I tell you—swear by the Holy Rood?"

"My promise is enough. If Señor Newman is alive, I am happy. If you tell me of him, I promise what you wish—always supposing that you have not harmed him."

"He is not harmed."

"Then where is he?"

"Here!"

"What?"

"Yes, Don Angel. I am sorry to deceive you, but this disguise has been necessary. Look under this dark skin, and you will find your friend."

He did not believe me: abruptly turning my face to the light, he stared at me: I smiled hard. The smile is the most characteristic trait of the human face, and he could not mistake mine. Frank friends call it a grin.

"But, for the love of Our Lady, what does all this mean?" he demanded.

I told him, as briefly as I could, then came rapidly to the point.

"So you see, Don Angel, it seems that I was murdered by a man of Roncal."

"But that is rubbish, señor. Who in Roncal would want to murder you?"

"That we must discover. Now, cast your mind back. It is eight weeks since I was with you—what has happened since then?"

"Ah—now this may be significant! Only five weeks ago it was announced that you were again in our valley. More than one man said that he had seen you in the mountains. I did not believe it. I did not believe that you could pass by Roncal and not come to me."

"You were quite right," I assured him. "It must have been El Aguila they saw. Well?"

But he was thinking hard, his eyes rolling: beads of sweat formed on his swarthy forehead.

"Name of God!" he cried. "But I have it now! Yes, señor, I know now who is your murderer! Glory to Our Lady that you came to me, for I would never have suspected!"

"Who is it? Tell me!"

"When it was reported that you were in Roncal again," he began, "I had but one guest—a visitor from Santander. I remember now how interested he was in the news. He had read your article on Roncal—it was that which had attracted him here, he said. I remember how he wished he could have met you. Yes, he is your murderer!"

"But, Don Angel, the Cagot described a man of Roncal—"

"I know," he broke in, "I was coming to that. This man was very intrigued at our local costume: he said that he was interested in the Folk Museum at Santander. From one man and another in the valley he bought pieces, till he had accumulated a complete Roncal costume.

And I remember that one day he went out in it, to the amusement of all." He paused for a moment for dramatic effect. "And what you have said reminds me of another thing: Maria complained one day about marks on her floor—*this man wore those horrible rubber heels!*"

I was glad that I had revealed myself to Don Angel! Now the case was sorting itself out very nicely. It would have been good business if Don Angel had given me a full description of the man. But, being an innkeeper, he could even give me his name and address!

"You are sure that it is not an assumed name?" I queried, as he found it in his register.

"Quite certain," he said. "These are disturbed days, and the police are troublesome. Your guest may prove to be a Fascist or a Communist, and either may be a criminal according to the outlook of authority. So always, in these days, I demand the papers of my guests. Yes, this is your man's name and his address. Why should he have thought of falsifying them? His plan, if plan it were, was foolproof. So it would have been, except that he murdered the wrong man!"

Yes, he had assuredly murdered the wrong man! I blamed the ancient Juan of Estella for selling my best suit of drill to the unfortunate El Aguila. Another stage of the puzzle was solved—the murderer undoubtedly thought he was killing me. But *why* did he want to kill me? I ought to be able to answer that question ere long.

"There is one thing more you can do for me, Don Angel," I said, as we thrashed out every aspect of the affair.

"I shall do it, of course. What is it?"

"You shall look after my donkey while I go to Santander!"

Two hours later Mitza and I were in the 'bus bound for Pamplona, and Tallulah was contentedly chewing hay in Don Angel's capacious stable.

From Pamplona we took the train. The seats of the third-class carriage were hard as the train pounded sullenly through the winding valleys. Mitza had never travelled by train before, and pressed herself close to me to draw courage and comfort. I was becoming fonder of the girl every day: I realised the potential complications but tried to think only of my task. Certainly she was proving extraordinarily useful, and was a perfect foil. She had enabled me to play my part without a shadow of suspicion. And a more active role for her lay immediately ahead.

Arrived at Santander, Mitza and I set off to find its *barrio*, or gypsy quarter. A dusky child directed us to a group of decrepit hovels on the outskirts of the town, and for the first time I saw something of the amazing *tzigane* freemasonry. No questions were asked: Mitza and I were invited into the nearest hut, and fed. The mere mention of El Manco, the chief of our tribe, was sufficient. I took the head-man of the settlement aside—I was relieved when he had addressed us in Spanish, not every Spanish gypsy speaks *Caló* exclusively. Only trifling assistance I needed, I said. If I collected copper and tin work in the town, would one of his men do the work for me? I myself was a *chalan*—a horse-dealer—but wished to knock around Santander for my own purposes, and the guise

of a coppersmith would be more suitable than my own. The old man asked no questions—which would have been against gypsy etiquette: for all he knew, I might have been planning a burglary or a murder, but that mattered little—I was a *tzigane*, and needed his help. When I left him I carried some of the appurtenances of my new trade, and some of another, and was so familiar a sight that I drew not a single glance of curiosity.

Later, when I looked back, I was very pleased with my few hours in Santander. We arrived soon after noon, and were actually out of the place by ten o'clock! For once everything worked to plan—generally it doesn't, and the most successful schemer is he who prepares for the usual fate of planning—half-success and half-failure.

Mitza made the first move, reconnoitring the apartment of this man who had behaved so mysteriously in Roncal. Luiz Santillana was his name, and he appeared to occupy a flat in a large block at the southern end of the town. Obviously I must keep out of the way myself—if this Santillana gentleman had intended to murder me, then presumably he knew me. And, although my disguise was good, I was taking no risk.

"I have a message for Señor Luiz Santillana," said Mitza to the concierge of the block. "Is he at home?"

"No," the man replied. "He went to San Sebastian this morning—he will not be back till five or six o'clock."

"Is his wife at home?"

"He has no wife—you ought to know that. Otherwise, how would *you* be visiting his rooms? You can't fool me with your 'messages'."

Mitza was a quick and intelligent girl, and in these sentences had learned a lot—not only that Señor Luiz Santillana was out of town, but that he was fond of the ladies. Both of these facts were to prove eminently useful.

Next I invaded the block, in my character of a travelling coppersmith. I was received coldly: there is an inherited prejudice against gypsy coppersmiths, arising from the legend that they forged the nails which fastened Christ to His cross. Nevertheless I did manage to collect one or two minor pieces of work from women in several flats. Twice I passed by Santillana's door before I stopped to examine it: the door was in a little recess of a landing which housed two others. I knocked at one of these, but got no answer: at the other I did not knock, for a stentorian snore announced the siesta.

But when I did halt I worked rapidly. First I knocked lightly, to confirm that the apartment was empty. Then I tackled its lock. Now every good policeman knows more about picking locks than he will ever admit, and I had learned well at Marshall's skilful hands. The lock was stout but simple and clumsy, and the turning of the wire was a matter of strength rather than skill. Three minutes were enough: I was inside.

Although I had two hours, according to the concierge, my examination was quickly made. I was very careful to disarrange nothing—it would have been fatal had I left any indication of my visit. The flat was substantially furnished, but I was amused at the number of amulets and totems hanging on the walls. On an old table was a

pile of political literature, but this was not remarkable in the Spain of the day. But I was more interested in clothes.

Santillana's wardrobe consisted of a curtain across a corner of the room. I found two pairs of shoes: both of them had rubber heels, but not of the pattern I had discovered on that mountainside above Roncal. Of course, he might be actually wearing that pair. Hurriedly I searched through the clothes hanging from wooden pegs. I could scarcely resist a cry of triumph—here was the Roncal costume I sought, honoured by a hanger of its own.

Ah, Señor Luiz Santillana, you were a little *too* confident that your plan was fool-proof! I would have caught you in any case, but your confidence convicted you. When you smash in a man's head, blood spurts. If he is knocked over a cliff, most of it falls with him. But his murderer finds it difficult to escape spotless.

Carefully I examined the voluminous purple cummerbund which had once swathed the stomach of some Roncal worthy. Yes, my reasoning was sound enough—here were stiff stains; if I were not grossly wrong, they would prove to be of human blood. I stuffed the cummerbund in my pocket—the chances were against his remarking its absence.

No further search was necessary: my evidence was complete. I paused only to confirm Mitza's impression that Santillana was known as a woman's man. His toilet appurtenances were stored in a cupboard, and the most superficial examination revealed the character of

the man. I could have proved in any court of law that, bachelor or no bachelor, Santillana was no stranger to women.

Of course, I could have handed Santillana over to the police. If the stains on the cummerbund fulfilled my suspicions, then I had such a case against him as police officers dream about. The cleverest counsel in the world could not have red-herringed the course of justice. But I wanted more than justice. Before I handed him over to anybody, I wanted to know why he wanted to murder *me*. And I was not alone in Spain in my distrust of the police. I knew nothing of the local force, but Santillana was evidently involved in politics. That might be the worse for him, according to his views: but I did not intend taking the risk of his having powerful political friends at court.

I hurried back to Mitza and coached her in her part: then left her squatting at a street corner commanding a view of Santillana's lodging. I myself went off to buy a car!

An anachronism for a gypsy? No, though I may destroy romance, I must confess that there *are* Spanish gypsies who drive about in cars. I invested three hundred pesetas—seven whole pounds!—in a Hispano-Suiza of ancient vintage. If gypsies should have cars, then this was the kind of car that a gypsy should have. It was ramshackle and dilapidated, but it could move—I confirmed that before purchase, with a suspicious garage proprietor by my side. The car had fallen from grace because, by modern standards, it simply drank petrol by the gallon.

But I could afford such a luxury for one night. Other minor purchases at a chemist's shop completed my preparations for the evening's adventure.

Between five and six o'clock Santillana was expected back, had said the concierge. Very well; but that was too early for my purpose. I left Mitza squatting at her street corner—naturally she did a bit of begging to fill in the time—and it was not until eight o'clock that she went back to the concierge and once more demanded to know if Señor Santillana had returned.

"Oh, but he has returned and gone out again," said the concierge—which was just as I had hoped and anticipated. Mitza exhibited the proper degree of distress.

"But I must find him, urgently!" she pleaded. "Do you know where he has gone?"

"Well, not for certain," said the concierge, "but most evenings he goes round to the Café Sevillana to meet his friends."

After informing me, Mitza made her way to the café. A friendly waiter pointed out Señor Santillana, who was sitting at the table with three or four men. Exactly how Mitza first excited his attention I do not know—the whole episode was distasteful to her, and I found her strangely reluctant to talk about it. Yet she was to do more unpleasant things for me in the course of this affair.

And she started with her battle half won, knowing that Santillana was a woman chaser. Anyway, within half an hour she had attracted his attention, presumably by effect of eyes, of raised and lowered lashes. He had at last made an excuse to leave his friends and join her, and

they had drunk together. He was a quick worker, this Santillana, and very rapidly came to the point. She played the poor fish skilfully—never refusing him, but just leading him on; her object was to delay their departure until it was thoroughly dark. Once satisfied on that score, at last she agreed to his lecherous suggestion that she should go back with him to his flat, which, as he pointed out was private and quiet.

The road that led immediately towards the block of flats was incomplete, and the pavements were lined with piles of rubbish and occasional heaps of bricks which promised more orderly development. Now your Spaniard is not fond of desolate scenes: the block of flats itself was now a scene of animation—it has been said that Spain never wakes up until darkness falls. At every door women were sitting gossiping with neighbours; children of all ages were playing in the street, dancing to the music of a piano organ. But the stretch of two hundred yards or more—which was as yet not a street—was completely deserted; it was dark, too, for one miserable street lamp alone lighted its dreary course.

I saw Mitza and her prospective lover approaching; as she passed the street lamp she gave me a signal by waving her hand behind her—the signal that this was Santillana. The subsequent action, I make bold to say, would not have been rivalled by Hollywood in its slickness; even as Mitza held out her hand behind her back, I slipped a pad of cotton wool into it. A second later I had flung my arms around the unsuspecting Santillana. I was, of course, behind him. He struggled automatically,

but I was considerably bigger and stronger; naturally, he would have shouted for help, but before his lips could open Mitza's hand had pressed against his mouth and nose that pad of cotton wool, liberally saturated with chloroform.

In a book, he would have fallen unconscious immediately, but in real life it may take a full minute to chloroform a healthy man. But we were undisturbed. It was so dark, and the little act was played so quietly that the family parties a mere hundred yards away knew nothing of it. Satisfied that the drug had taken effect, I half-nelsoned Santillana over my shoulder. The ancient car was standing half a dozen yards away, and I bundled him into the back. Mitza and I climbed in and I drove off rapidly, only halting when clear of the town to tie up our captive's arms and legs and to gag his mouth against the time when he should recover consciousness.

Then we drove on through the night. I was happy in a job well done; happy, too, in that I was confident that very soon now I would unravel the final tangle of mystery which had intrigued me so forcibly. I said nice things to Mitza, as she deserved, about her share in the business. My heart warmed to the girl—this chance partner of mine who had backed me so loyally. She snuggled close to me as I drove the ancient Hispano-Suiza over the excellent roads of northern Spain. Once she half-dozed, and I caught little involuntary murmurs—words of love and passion.

The rapid dawn was breaking as I drove the car over the bumpy turf right up to El Manco's encampment—

he had not moved since the day I had first met him. The noise of my vehicle—which rattled like a traction engine—woke the ancient gypsy chieftain, who rushed from his tent.

“Ah, it is you!” he cried, and there was a gay friendliness in his welcome. “Well, and how have you fared?”

“I have fared very well,” I said, “for I have brought back to you the murderer of your nephew, El Aguila.”

“What?” he shouted. “And alive?”

“Yes, and alive,” I said.

“Joy be upon this day!” he chanted. “And upon you! The God of the Romanies first directed you to me. You and I shall be blood brothers for this day’s work. Now let us see him, this man who thought he could kill a gypsy unavenged!”

I tugged at the body of Santillana, still lying inert in the bottom of the car. If he had come round, he had lost consciousness again. Daylight was strengthening as I removed the gag from his mouth—he was sitting helplessly on the ground, supported by my arm. For the first time I saw his face—and I shouted in surprise, allowing him to fall to the ground haphazardly. There was reason for my surprise; when I had heard Santillana’s name it had meant nothing to me, *but now I saw his face I recognised him.* And in that recognition, so it appeared, lay the clue to the mystery which had hitherto baffled me.

CHAPTER VI

THE 'THROW-BACK' AS a literary device is alleged to be unworkmanlike; but it is, I am afraid, essential in this instance. My readers will already have perceived that this is not quite a conventional story. I cannot guarantee a continuous sequence of clues and thrills, each more intriguing than the last. Real life is not like that—Fate is an evil genius, with a strong streak of sheer devilment in her make-up: she is prone to anti-climax, which most stories avoid as bad technique, but to which mine is liable. Particularly I cannot promise the skilful hiding of the mystery until the last chapter, and then a clear explanation and a rapid denouement. This makes thrilling reading, but is very far from actuality, as any policeman or secret service man will tell you. As a matter of fact, I am about to reveal my mystery now—but it doesn't end my story, not by any means.

Some weeks earlier, as I have said, I had been touring Spain on behalf of the *News-Courier*—a journey at random to take the feel of a country which, we were even then persuaded, was destined for the miseries of civil war. Now the moral standards of a journalist must not be too high; to get his vital information it may be necessary to execute such stratagems and deceits as he would heartily dislike in his private capacity. Thus, in my journey I had gone out of my way to seek the diverse opinions of

the many political parties in Spain. Again I would insist that political methods in Spain are not those of our own country. In England I could interview a Communist with all good will, and could pass on to a Fascist the next minute; but, in Spain, the first thing the Communist would ask me would concern my own political convictions, and if I were anything far removed from a Communist he would either refuse to talk or else begin to fight. Similarly, if I professed the slightest liberal ideas I would get no information but only hostility in a Fascist quarter. Consequently I adopted a most ancient but efficient journalistic method—when I talked to Communists I was a Communist, and when I talked to Fascists I was a Fascist.

Now I remembered that in the course of this journey I had penetrated without any great difficulty to the headquarters of a local Fascist organisation in Santander. I recalled with a chuckle that I was received in some honour there because I talked from personal knowledge about Sir Oswald Mosley, of whom obviously they had a high opinion. I did not mention that at the time I met Sir Oswald Mosley he was no Fascist but a Labour Member of Parliament. I remembered, too, that at Santander some of the younger men had talked very wildly. I had taken no notice of it, because it is a fashion among young Fascists to talk wildly. Extravagant talk is by no means a prerogative of Fascists, but rather of youth; you notice it more when youth holds extreme opinions.

Now when Don Angel Garcia of Isaba had mentioned Santander, the name of the town had awakened no

echoing impression in my mind; but suddenly the meaning of it all became clear as I gazed at the unconscious face before me. For I knew this man, Luiz Santillana, of Santander—I had last seen him in the Fascist headquarters there.

My deductions were now fairly obvious ones. These Fascists were evidently not so self-centred as I had imagined. Some of them must have chanced across my articles in the *News-Courier*—which is *not* Fascist—and I can imagine the consternation they caused. ‘This man was a spy among us,’ they must have argued. ‘He came here just to worm out our ideas and our secrets; confident of his good faith, because of the recommendations he carried with him, we even showed him the little arsenal of weapons which we have accumulated against the day of reckoning. But all the time he was a Communist—or, worse still, some measly Liberal—spying upon us!’

Again, in England such a discovery would have led to hard words, fisticuffs maybe, or even an action in a court of law. But in the Spain of the spring of 1936, smaller causes than this led to assassination and other forms of ‘elimination.’ My betrayal of their confidence would be quite enough to condemn me to death; they would probably recall the wild things some of their men had talked about—and they had probably not realised that I had applied to these wildnesses the necessary ninety per cent discount. I would be a dangerous enemy in their eyes, and when they learned that I was in the adjacent province, wandering the lonely spaces of the Roncal valley—well, it would seem a heaven-sent opportunity to remove me

as a source of information—a source of information which might precipitate the outbreak before it was thoroughly prepared.

Yes, as I sat back and thought it out, a very few minutes' consideration convinced me that my reasoning was sound. But reasoning is not good enough in cases like these—I wanted proof.

"I am beginning to see things now," I said to El Manco. "I have seen this man before, and I think I know why he wanted to kill me, but killed your nephew in my place; nevertheless I am not sure—he will have to talk."

"Oh, he will talk!" the old gypsy assured me. "You leave that part to us! We will make him talk! You shall go to sleep, for you have been on the move all night. As soon as he wakes"—and he indicated the unconscious figure—"then I will wake you as well, for assuredly his tongue will soon rattle!"

I lay down with Mitza for a few hours' rest. Mitza huddled close beside me—I believe that she sensed that my task was now almost complete, and despaired that I might leave her. But when we woke, Santillana was still unconscious. Whether Mitza had given him a stronger dose of chloroform than I knew, or whether he had banged his head on the floor of the car, or whether it was sheer fright, I do not know, but not until the early hours of the afternoon did his eyes open. Even then they were staring, and vacant, not taking in what they saw.

Then one of the women went to him, a cup of spirit in her hand. He drank it greedily—for his mouth and throat must have been parched like a rasp. Then he

gasped and spat as the fiery liquid poured down his throat; but a few minutes afterwards he was awake.

It was almost comic to see the blank surprise in his eyes as he gazed round and saw himself surrounded by swarthy gypsies. He rubbed his eyes and passed his hand through his hair; you could almost see his brain working. ‘What has happened? Was I not taking a pretty gypsy girl home for a kiss and a cuddle? And where am I now? Why, there’s that gypsy girl that I met in the café. Ah!’ a sudden realisation. ‘It must have been a trap; I have been kidnapped for something or other. *Why* have I been kidnapped?’

And whether that murder was strong on his conscience I do not know, but great beads of sweat forced their way from the pores of his brow and trickled down his face.

El Manco began to question him.

“Your name is Luiz Santillana, of Santander, we know,” he began. “And we know that five weeks ago you were in the valley of Roncal, staying at Isaba. Is not that correct?”

“Well, what if it is?” replied Santillana; his voice was hoarse and cracked, either from the effects of the drug or the fear within him. “What does all this mean? Where am I? What has happened?”

“You are in my camp,” said El Manco, “and here you will remain until you have spoken. Now one day at Isaba, you dressed yourself in the costume of the men of Roncal, and went out to walk on the mountains. Is this true, Santillana?”

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said wearily. "My head aches."

"The head of the man you met on the mountains did not ache, when you hit him with the stick," cried El Manco suddenly uncontrolled. "It had not time to ache. Well, what have you got to say about that, Señor Santillana?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," muttered the captive. But he did. If ever I had wanted proof, it was there in his demeanour.

Yet, though El Manco plied him with questions, he refused to talk. A dozen ways and with a dozen approaches of the subtle ingenuity which could only originate in a gypsy mind, El Manco brought him mentally to that precipice, the scene of the fatal blow. But Santillana was obstinate. True, his mind was still dazed from the effects of his kidnapping, but even as his brain cleared he still refused to talk—maybe because he saw the very real danger confronting him. Instead, he flung out warnings of the Civil Guards, and what they would do.

"Very well," said El Manco, after an hour or more's fruitless questioning. "We will give you a little while to think over this matter, and then I will talk to you again."

Two gypsies standing beside him, Santillana walked wearily into the tent. Then he flopped on to the ground, rubbing his bruised ankles. The two men squatted beside him—he was to have no peace.

"I should like to question him again," said El Manco, an hour later. "Maybe it would be as well if you did not

come in, Señor Bernardo. There will be no trouble subsequently, but if there should be so, I would rather it fall upon myself alone. Let me persuade him, and then I will call you in to hear him talk."

I suspected that the old man had methods of persuasion which he did not wish me to see, for gypsies the world over have secrets of that kind. In the adjoining tent, I heard a gasp, a groan, and a shriek of anguish—a shriek which was stifled at its height, as a gag was forced into the open mouth. About half an hour later I heard agonizing sounds from the tent; although there were no screams I heard them—I *heard* the miserable Santillana opening his throat to the unresponsive stifling of the dirty piece of rag which was thrust firmly into his mouth.

El Manco returned to me.

"I have failed—but only so far," he said significantly. "That man is stubborn."

"Yes, he has more courage than I thought," I agreed. And, when you think of it, men who adopt extreme political creeds are seldom lacking in physical courage, at any rate.

"Yet, I will make him talk," said El Manco. "What I have done is only the beginning. I have just given him time to think it over."

"Listen, El Manco," I exclaimed, a few moments later. "I think I have a better idea. This man is no coward—I am not at all certain that he would yield to physical torture."

"Ah, I know why you say that," the old man commented. "Your heart says it, not your mind. I have met

your type before. It is because you do not like the prompting to speak—not of the fashion which I apply."

"No, it is not that, El Manco," I said; and I meant it. Our ideas on torture are very sentimental; I remember an object lesson during the War, when I had helped a French Intelligence Officer to run to earth a German spy.

"Well, that's that!" I had said, when we had got him under firm arrest.

"Ah, but that's only the beginning," said my French friend. "Now we must make him talk."

"Suppose he won't?"

"He will!" said my friend, "you may be certain of that!"

"What?" I asked. "You don't mean—torture?"

"Assuredly I do," he replied. "Why not?"

I argued in conventional manner, but he would not hear me.

"My dear Newman," he said, "look at it this way. I know it isn't pretty, but war isn't pretty. You can't fight a war of any kind with gloves on. This man is in possession of information which may be vital; it may be that if I make him talk he will reveal secrets which will save the lives of thousands of our brave *poilus*. Do you mean to say that I ought to be squeamish about hurting a German spy to get information like that? Your argument, my dear Newman, is absurd—you belong to your Victorian age, when your gallant officers would rather die than face facts. Fortunately I am not troubled with such traditions."

Nor was he. He *did* make that spy talk, and sure enough the information he got from the spy did save the lives of thousands of *poilus*—and thousands of British Tommies as well. Consequently, I was sincere in assuring El Manco that my attitude towards torture was not a conventional one.

“But I do not believe that you will persuade him to talk by *physical* torture,” I persisted. “Now, this is my plan. This man, Santillana, is superstitious—I know it, for I searched his rooms and found all kinds of queer amulets in his clothes and on the walls. Let us play upon that superstition—then his nerve will break.”

“I do not understand,” said El Manco.

“For example, let us take him back to the valley of Roncal, and let me dress in my suit of drill and sit upon the fatal spot just as your nephew did. Then you shall bring him along, and when he sees me there—— But I have a better idea still.”

“Your plan would be dangerous,” said El Manco. “In getting him to Roncal we might be seen.”

“Yes, but my second idea washes out your objection,” I cried. “Look, El Manco, cut out the torture, will you?”

“But he must speak,” he insisted.

“He *shall* speak,” I promised.

“Then how will you do it?”

“Leave it until this evening,” I said. “Feed him—do whatever you like with him, but do not torture him. Keep him here under guard; watch him always so that his nerves become frayed. Then get out those clothes I

left with you—particularly my suit of drill, like that one El Aguila wore at the moment of his death."

"But what are you going to do?" asked the old chief.

"I am going for a ride in my car," I said. "Not very far—I am just going into Sanguesa to buy some sal-ammoniac!"

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD GYPSY was right; that sal-ammoniac *did* tingle, but persistent application, with liberal douches of warm water, removed the gypsy stain and made me a white man again. I saw Mitza's eyes open wide in amazement as she carried supplies of warm water into the tent which was serving as my bathroom. She must have known long since that I was no gypsy, but evidently she had never attempted to picture me as a *gorgio*—she was quite content to accept me as her *rom*.

I could see that she was concerned, too, and talked to her in friendly fashion, appreciating the part that she had played in my little drama. She was desperately anxious to know why I had so suddenly ceased to become a gypsy, but when I let her into my secret she gurgled with delight. My scheme was one which would appeal to a gypsy's mind.

Darkness had fallen before I put it into operation. El Manco himself was necessarily privy to the plot, and set the scene with uncanny skill. The miserable Santillana, his feet firmly bound, had been carried out to join in the evening meal—his hands having been only temporarily released so that he could feed himself. Then he had been left by the camp fire while the gypsies went about their little tasks before retiring. First one group and then another went into their crude tents, and it seemed as if

Santillana had been entirely forgotten. He sat there awkwardly by the fire, quite unable to move.

Any reader who knows anything of the Spanish mind will have recognised my plan. Your Spaniard is one of the most superstitious men in Europe; he is not to be intimidated by physical torture—El Manco's psychology was quite unsound; there has always been a trace of hardness in the Spanish nature. The Spaniard, among the races of Europe, has always been the one most indifferent to pain and the infliction of pain upon others. That bull fighting is the national sport of Spain is no accident; a national sport can usually be accepted as a pointer towards national characteristics.

But coupled with the callousness and indifference to suffering, the Spaniards throughout history have been deeply superstitious. Strangely unconcerned with hurts of the body, they are very susceptible to torture of the mind; it was precisely this type of terror that I wished to inflict upon our helpless prisoner.

Inside the tent I completed my make-up—it was a simple one, for I was pretending to be *myself!* Santillana, even if he had seen me, had certainly not recognised me in the nondescript gypsy who had carried him off. Now, however, I was white again; I was wearing my own clothes—a suit of drab drill which was the own brother to that in which the unfortunate El Aguila had been killed. In my stage career I must have played a good hundred parts, but it amused me mightily to have to play the part of myself—my dead self. Since the successful playing of a character depends so largely upon the actor getting

under that character's skin, however, I felt that I ought to give a good performance!

At least it was a successful one, for my audience of one was completely overwhelmed with emotion. His head was sagging over his chest in sheer weariness—he had been either unconscious or bound in an uncomfortable position for twenty-four hours. This gave me the opportunity for a dramatic entrance. Slipping quietly from the tent, I was actually standing on the other side of the fire before he knew that I was there; in fact, I had to whisper his name before he saw me.

“Señor Santillana, Luiz Santillana!” I hissed melodramatically over the fire, “Santillana, I have come back to speak to you.”

I saw his head lift wearily, but then a sudden blaze of fear lightened his eyes; they opened wide, and he could not resist a scream of horror.

“Why do you cry, Santillana?” I whispered again. “Why should you cry at me? I do not seek to kill you, as you killed me.”

He did not appear to find this comment comforting, and once again howled aloud in his terror. But the gypsy discipline held, and only El Manco emerged from his tent nearby.

“What is the matter?” he shouted roughly. “Why do you howl like a frightened cur?”

“Look!” cried the terrified Santillana, nodding towards me, and pointing with his bound hands. “Look!”

“Look?” repeated El Manco. “What at?”

"On the other side of the fire," the captive shouted again. "See, he is there! A ghost—he has come to torment me!"

"What ghost? What are you drivelling about?" exclaimed the gypsy.

"Look, man, can you not see him?" shrieked Santillana.

"But you are surely mad—there is no one there!"

"There is, I tell you," he cried again. "Over there—the other side of the fire. He is dead!"

"Ah, what rubbish," El Manco derided him. "You are dreaming. How can he be there if he is dead? There is no one there. Don't let me hear any more of this screaming like a child, disturbing our rest."

And he walked back to his tent, heaping curses on the miserable Santillana, who was now quaking in his terror.

"It is no use screaming, Santillana," I said. Now I had abandoned my preliminary whisper and had adopted a tone peculiar to the stage ghost—not the classic Hamlet type, but the Lyceum variety. I had always imagined it grossly overdone in the old Victorian plays, but it was far more effective than I would have believed. Certainly it made Santillana writhe in fright.

"It is no use calling to El Manco," I continued, in a deep half-whisper that seemed to come from a long way off—by no means a difficult feat for an actor to achieve—"I have come back to you, Santillana, and to you alone."

"But why?" he cried hoarsely. "Why should you come back to torture me?"

"You did not think of torture when you struck me on the mountainside," I said. "For weeks I have been wandering in purgatory, and I can find no rest; neither heaven nor hell is open to me because my mind is so troubled. That is why I have returned to you, Santillana; that is why, unless you comfort my mind, I shall return to you again and again."

"But why—why do you torment me?" he repeated, his voice cracking in its terror.

"You killed me, Santillana!" I accused him, dramatically. "I sat upon the mountainside, and I saw you approach me. You were dressed as a peasant of Roncal, and I thought you were a friend. When you got near to me, as I was sitting on the rock, you struck me behind the head, and I fell from the mountainside. I did not suffer, Santillana, for I was dead before I fell. You killed me! And I have come back to find out why!"

His eyes rolled in his agony, but his mouth refused to frame a further word.

"*Why* should you have killed me, Santillana? When last I met you, you greeted me as a friend; and now you have killed me. Well, that is past; I am dead, and nothing can give me life again. But at least you owe me rest, Santillana; I cannot wander for ever in the eternal shades. It is a strange country, this land between the earth and the sky; there is darkness in it, Santillana, and strange things in the darkness; and there is no rest. There are beings who wander always, unable to find peace. They come out upon you in the darkest corners, they torture you with their groans and misery. Your mind is in a

continuous torment; sleep is unknown. Oh, I am weary, Santillana; do you not know what weariness there is! That is the life in the shades. Unless you can release me from it, Santillana, and give me peace, then you will have to come with me, that we may wander together eternally in this land of darkness."

"No, no," he shrieked, appalled at the ghostly prospect with which I confronted him.

"Then give peace to my mind, Santillana. I cannot find that peace until I know why you have killed me. When I was presented for the Judgment they demanded to know that why. They said that most men who were killed were bad men, with a reason for their killing; and they demanded to know what was mine. I could not answer them, Santillana; I may not be an angel, but I never deserved a death like that; and you, Santillana, must give me the answer; otherwise you shall come with me into the shades, or I will haunt you day and night—particularly at night—for the rest of your life."

"Oh, leave me, for pity's sake leave me!"

"You had no pity when you struck me on the mountain, Santillana. It is you who must have pity now; for if you have none for me, then I will have none for you. Rather will I come back to you every night, and will bring with me my friends from the Land of Darkness—these weird shapes which pounce on a man when he is least prepared. So have it whichever way you will, Santillana. I want peace, and you are the only man who can give it to me. Tell me, Santillana, why did you kill me?"

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A few brief moments passed, and a great log collapsed in the middle of the fire, sending up a cloud of smoke and sparks.

“*Why did you kill me, Santillana?*” I whispered again. “*Why, why, why?*”

“Oh, I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to!” he cried, and I chuckled inwardly, for I saw that his nerve was now completely broken, his resistance cracked. “I protested, but they said I must; they said that I was like a soldier who must obey his orders on the field of battle.”

“And who said this, Santillana?” I persisted.

“*They* said it. They all said it. They ordered me, and persuaded me. They drew lots, and mine was the name!” he cried.

“And who are ‘they’?”

“You know them—you knew them at Santander. Cervera and Rodriguez and Alto—and there were others, too—I seem to have forgotten who was there.”

“Ah, I know the men of whom you are talking,” I said. “You mean that Fascist group with whom I talked, that spring day many weeks ago?”

“Yes,” he whispered.

“But that is not enough, Santillana; that will not give me peace. Why should these men want to kill me? When I came to Santander they welcomed me. They took me to their homes. They talked to me of their ideas—their aspirations—their ambitions. They were thinking as thousands of young men were thinking all over Spain, and they merely exposed their thoughts to me. No, Santillana, your story will not do—that will not give me

peace. Why did these men receive me, and then order you to murder me?"

"They discovered that you were a spy," he said.

"A spy?" I repeated. "How, then, was I a spy?"

"Someone brought to them articles which you had written in an English newspaper," the captive went on. "Then they saw that you were not a Fascist, as you had pretended."

"I see," I said. "But, Santillana, even now that is not enough. Maybe I was wrong in pretending to think like them—though it is an old newspaper device, and they should have known it—there were journalists among them. You are trying to tell me, Santillana, that because they thought I was a Fascist and then found that I was not, because of this they ordered you to murder me? No, Santillana, that will not bring me peace, for it does not ring true. Men do not countenance murder in their hearts for such small things. Think again, Santillana. They ordered you to kill me, you say; well, I will believe you, for I never thought that you had death in your heart. But *why* did they order you to kill me, Santillana? I will tell you. Because I knew things which they did not wish me to know. Is that the truth?"

"Yes, it is the truth," he whispered.

"Then tell me, Santillana, tell me what it is they did not wish me to know. Then your murder of me will be explained, and I can go back to the Judgment and can find peace from my wanderings in the shades. They talked to me of many things—of their hopes for Spain, of the disasters of the past—of the rising against the

Government which all knew must come soon. Was it because of this last that you were made to kill me, Santillana?"

"No," he said.

"Then what was it? You *must* tell me, Santillana, otherwise no moment apart from fear shall you ever know in your life. What was it that they told me and afterwards they feared?"

"It was about Gibraltar," he whispered.

"Gibraltar!" I echoed so sharply that for the moment I forgot my ghostly voice and resumed my own. Fortunately his terror was so abject that he was long past remarking such discrepancies.

"Yes," he said, "they talked to you about the plan to capture Gibraltar. They had talked with you about it, thinking that you were a Fascist; and when they found that you were not, they were afraid."

"So," I whispered, "it was because of Gibraltar that I was murdered! You are sure of this, Santillana?"

"I swear it by all the Holy Trinity! And that is all, I swear it is all! And I swear that I only killed you because they made me. They put names in a hat—they said you were dangerous. It was not only your newspaper articles—someone discovered that you had been a British Intelligence Officer, and what you did during the war. They were afraid of you, and said you must be removed. The names were put in a hat, and mine was drawn out; that is why I killed you—I swear it."

"Very well, Santillana," I said, "I shall soon know if you are speaking the truth. If you still have lied to me,

then I shall still be condemned to the shades, and shall come back and haunt you. If you have told me the truth, then I shall be able to find peace."

"I have not lied, I swear it," he cried.

"One more thing I must know," I persisted. "This talk about Gibraltar—did it begin in Santander?"

"No, in Salamanca," he said. "It is Castillo's scheme—I know nothing of it, I swear. And now go away! The sight of you terrifies me; I can still see you falling down that mountainside—I shall never, never forget! Go away! And please, please do not come back!"

"That depends upon you, Santillana. If you have lied, I will come back, and I will give you such torture as no man ever knew on this earth."

"I have not lied!" he shrieked. "I have told you the truth—and everything."

And I was quite certain that he had, for his mental condition was such that he simply could not have invented a lie. I needed now only to make a graceful exit.

"It is upon your own head, Santillana. Look! Look over your shoulder! The moon is rising; when the moon rises, I must depart."

He looked abruptly over his shoulder, as if expecting a new horror, and in the second that his head turned I slipped unobtrusively behind a neighbouring tree. When his glance returned he cried out again in fear to find me gone.

It was El Manco's cue. Again he came from his tent, cursing the unfortunate captive. He called to two of his tribe, and they carried Santillana into a tent and dropped

him down. Then they lay by his side; they did not propose the labour of constant watching. He was still bound hand and foot, and they solved the difficulty of alarm by tying pieces of string around his little toes and fingers and around their own.

I slipped into my own tent, where a wide-eyed and half-terrified Mitza awaited me. A moment later El Manco joined us.

“By the gods of the earth!” he exclaimed, “but you did that well, *gorgio*; you almost frightened me myself with your ghost! No wonder that wretch’s brain cracked!”

“And you played your part well, El Manco,” I complimented him. “Your intervention was perfectly timed, your derision was just right. And, of course, what a scene for a ghostly appearance! The traditional wooden glade, a gypsy encampment, and a dying fire.”

“Never, never have I witnessed such a scene,” he protested. “Señor, when this affair is over, you should become an actor. Could you play a part like that, you would move the multitude.”

“I *am* an actor, El Manco,” I said, and a light of understanding passed across his wrinkled, intelligent face.

“And you found out what you wanted to know?” he asked.

“Yes, I found out what I wanted to know,” I agreed. “I know now why El Aguila was killed in the belief that he was me.”

“And you can avenge yourself?”

“Yes, I think I can avenge myself,” I said.

"Then that is good," he said simply. "For the avenging of El Aguila you can leave to me. I thank you, señor, for your aid in this business. I am an old man, and not so active as I was; but for you I doubt if the murder of my nephew would ever have been brought home for me; for, now that I have heard your story, I do not believe that the police or even the men of my tribe would ever have nosed him out. You are a man, señor, although you are a *gorgio*. Maybe in our fiction, that night you came, there is some word of truth. Your mind is such that I believe there is affinity between us; maybe back in your ancestry there is some *tzigane* whose blood has been transmitted to you. You can command me as you will—me and my tribe. No matter what happens, the debt will always be on our side. Before we part, señor, I would be honoured if you would become my brother. You are willing?"

"I shall be honoured, El Manco," I said.

"Then here is bread and here is salt. Let us dip the bread in the salt and eat it together." This we did solemnly. "And now, señor, I will prick your finger and will taste your blood, and you shall do the same to me."

This primitive rite concluded, El Manco took my left hand in his and placed his right arm about my shoulder. "Now we are brothers," he said. "I know that you do not belong to my world, but in these days a brother is a brother, and if the world should use you hardly there is always food and peace in my encampment. Good night, my brother."

And I was left alone in the dark tent with Mitza, who had been squatting on the pile of dirty blankets which served as our bed, listening to this strange conversation.

"What does it all mean?" she whispered as soon as El Manco had gone.

"Never mind now, Mitza," I comforted her, for she was very troubled. "It is late, let us sleep. There is a good deal we must do to-morrow."

"You are not going away to-morrow?" she cried. "My great-uncle spoke of parting."

"I am not going away to-morrow, Mitza," I said. "Forget all about these things now; remember only the great help you have been to me. Lie in my arms, Mitza, and forget. Let us be happy while we can."

As that argument is the very basis of the gypsy temperament, she accepted it without qualification.

But as she slept, her bosom pressing rhythmically against my chest, I was thinking furiously. Again I had to cast my mind back to that day when the cocksure young Fascists of Santander had with great bravado paraded their boasts before me. I recalled how, in the room of one of them, I had chanced across a plan of Gibraltar. There was nothing illegal or even suggestive in that—it was the ordinary plan such as can be bought in any guide book—yet, by virtue of its unusual appearance as a decoration in a Spanish bedroom, I commented on it. Two or three of the young Fascists present, apparently forgetting for the moment that I was English, had at once entered into a bitter diatribe against Britain holding this

essential strip of Spanish territory. They began a long discussion about the rights and wrongs of military conquest. Gibraltar, they argued, ought not to belong to England: we had no claim upon it either from the historic or ethnic point of view—we had merely conquered it. This argument, coming from Fascists, seemed to me rather comic, and I could scarcely refrain from pointing out the parallel of Italy in Abyssinia—a campaign which only a few moments earlier they had been claiming as a model of Fascist achievement!

But then one of them had allowed to slip out a thought that doubtless he would have preferred to have concealed—no less than a suggestion of a Fascist plot to seize Gibraltar! His companions, with few exceptions, were too excited to realise where their tongues were leading them, and one or two of them began a reasoned defence of the scheme. If the Fascists were to seize Gibraltar, they pointed out, the whole of Spain would rally to them. For whatever ideas Spain might have about Fascism and Communism, all Spaniards had only one idea about Gibraltar. I agreed with this argument, but gently asked how they proposed to capture Gibraltar.

Oh, it would not be too difficult, they declared. England, it was well known, was a decadent power—her hesitant conduct during the Abyssinian War had proved that. She was ready to talk, but was not ready to back her talk by force; consequently, if Gibraltar were seized, all she would do would be to appeal to the League of Nations—and everybody knew precisely how much that was worth.

At this point, one or two of the elder men joined in, seeking to curb the exuberances of their fellows. I would understand, of course, they pointed out, that this was only just talk—vague aspirations born of a sense of injustice. I assured them that I understood the position exactly. Indeed, I thought I did. Hotheads in all countries talk exaggerated rubbish. Certainly I would never have given another thought to the idea, but that I chanced across it three or four times in my journey from the north of Spain to the south. There might be nothing in the plot, but it was certain that a good many hundreds of young Fascists were thinking about it. I did wonder at first, in fact, whether I ought to hand in an official warning, but when eventually I arrived at Gibraltar and saw its massive and impregnable defences, and compared the sturdy energy of its defenders with the listless inertia of the potential attackers, I just grinned to myself and said nothing—I just dismissed the idea as another of those vague extravagances which are so common in extremist circles.

But Santillana's confession had opened up a new line of thought. Was the supposed attack on Gibraltar a myth, a joke, a vain aspiration, a hotheaded idea? *If so, why had they wanted to murder me because I knew about it?*

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE MORNING I called to El Manco.

"I have to go into Pamplona," I said. "I leave this man Santillana with you. You understand the position? You can hand him over to the police, if you like—there is ample evidence to send him straight to the *garrotte*."

"There is the evidence," he agreed, "but you do not know our police. They were always erratic, but to-day they are undependable. But leave this miserable wretch to us. He murdered one of our tribe—we do not need police to avenge us."

"All right," I said. "But look, don't let him get away, whatever happens! It would be decidedly awkward for me if he did!"

"Do not worry, my brother," El Manco remarked dryly. "He will not get away!"

Mitza looked after me pathetically as I persuaded the ancient Hispano-Suiza to start up. But in spite of her entreaties I would not take her with me. Before, as a gypsy girl with a gypsy man, she had been the perfect foil, making me a completely inconspicuous figure: as a gypsy girl with an Englishman, however, she would attract attention to me—for, whatever certain of their traducers may say, gypsy morals are very high, and it is very very seldom that a gypsy girl gives herself to a *gorgio*. In some of the Spanish cities, true, you will find

gypsy prostitutes, but I have noted that these girls are nearly always drawn from the ranks of urban gypsies, who have settled down for many generations to a slum existence. The nomad Romany of the open road despises them furiously.

I gave Mitza another job, to occupy her. I would be in Pamplona for two days, maybe three, I said, but I was definitely coming back. In the meantime she could go back to Roncal and rescue Tallulah, eating out her heart in Don Angel's stables. I gave Mitza money for the journey there by 'bus, and she recovered her lost smiles at the thought of action.

At Pamplona I took a room in the Hotel Perla, put through a 'phone call to Marshall, and then demanded a bath—my first after a week of filth. Often I have 'phoned to England from Spain, and the connection has taken hours to make. Naturally, as if in spite,¹ this one went through in unprecedented time, and I had to scramble out of the bath to take the call!

I needed no more than six minutes to give Marshall a digest of what had happened, and to tell him what I wanted. He undertook to see our friend Willoughby Mason, of the Foreign Office, at once, and to despatch my requirements by air mail within a few hours. He even fished for an invitation to join me, but did not get it—official intervention was the last thing I wanted at the moment.

There was nothing for me to do. After the nonchalant lassitude of Spain, it was a relief to think of the vigorous

¹ Or maybe even the Spanish operator recognised that intriguing number, Whitehall 1212.

energy of Marshall and Mason, who had never let me down and never would.¹

At least I had earned a rest; only occasional exhaustion had induced sleep in the appalling conditions of a gypsy tent. Not even the affection of Mitza could make me forget the fleas of our ragged bed!

I am never bored in Pamplona, either. The ancient capital of Navarre is a fascinating city, deserving far more visitors than it gets. I resisted an inward urge to action—a suggestion that I should make contact with the local Fascist group. Marshall and Mason would not fail me.

Nor did they. Next evening I received a considerable parcel—which must have cost a tidy sum by air rates. It consisted of a good but well-worn suit-case, containing clothes and papers. I examined the papers eagerly: yes, Marshall had done his job well, if unofficially. Here was everything I needed for a complete change of character.

I longed for action, and would have dashed off right away. But caution demanded that I should return to the gypsy camp to see what could be done about the despatch of Santillana; and courtesy, to say the least, demanded that I should take farewell of Mitza.

My first enquiry was soon settled. "Where is Santillana?" I asked.

"He has gone," El Manco replied.

"What! You didn't let him get away?"

"Have no fear, my brother," said the old chief. "That wretch did not get away: he will never get away. He had the blood of a Romany on his hands. Here is his grave.

¹ See *Spy*, *Secret Servant*, and *The Mussolini Murder Plot*.

There is a stake though his inside, so that he can never return to haunt us."

Not a hundred yards away from the camp fire was a fresh mound of earth. Well, it was all very improper and unofficial, no doubt, but I had no blame for the gypsies. Their revenge was no more than a wild justice. In a way I was relieved, in fact. Certainly Santillana would never be traced—gypsies don't talk about things of this kind. His friends in Santander would be puzzled, but in the unhappy Spain of the spring of 1936 sudden disappearances were all too common. Probably the Communists would be blamed: or it might be assumed that some jealous husband or lover had planted a knife in the philanderer's back.

Mitza had returned, and Tallulah was grazing contentedly close by Santillana's grave. I could foresee complications as I looked at Mitza's expressive face and those dark, flashing eyes.

But a diversion postponed my inevitable awkward moment. As I squatted with El Manco by the fire, I heard subdued groans from an adjoining tent.

"It is El Aguila's wife: her time has come!" the old gypsy said, noting that I turned instinctively and enquiringly in the direction of the groans. I had never seemed to realise that the lady was my mother-in-law!

Fortunately for my peace of mind—for her groans were continuous and penetrating—her labour was nearing its end. There came the moment when another woman emerged from the tent, bearing the naked new-born child in her arms. "A boy! A boy!" she cried, triumphantly.

The whole camp gathered round, a hive of industry. Women were scooping out a hole in the ground beside the fire, and filling it with water. Here the baby—a horrible sight to my non-medical mind—received its first and ceremonial bath. Already a youth was running to the village to summon a priest, and as soon as the women had bathed the child—my brother-in-law!—they began their preparations for the feast.

“The boy will be a comfort to her,” El Manco remarked. “She is fond of children.” I was glad to hear it, for this was her twelfth—and she was little more than thirty!

I felt somewhat responsible for El Aguila’s death. After all, he had been killed in mistake for me.

“Look here,” I said to my ‘blood-brother.’ “Is there anything I can do for this woman?”

“I know your thoughts,” he declared. “You need not fear: she is of my tribe, and will never want. But doubtless you would become *padrino*—godfather—to the child? That would please her.”

Of course I agreed. I found that my first duty was to provide the wine for the birthday feast. Two youths placed the rough wooden saddle on Tallulah’s back and set off for Sanguesa. El Manco had suggested twenty pesetas, but I gave them forty. This was my first godson, and I meant to do him proud!

That evening was so fascinating that I almost forgot my more serious mission. The child once christened—Bernardo, in my honour, the *fiesta* began. The priest took one drink with us and then very wisely retired.

At first we ate a *pirria* or stew of goat's flesh—El Manco assured me that he had killed the goat himself. This was a relief, for gypsies are rather fond of meat *mulo mas*—killed by the hand of God: that is to say, an animal which has died by the wayside. Once, I recalled, I had had to restrain Mitza, who had discovered with glee the carcase of a vulture among the rocks of Roncal.

The youths had bought the wine for its quantity rather than quality. Its fierce grip made my throat tingle, but the *tziganes* thought it good. They laughed and shouted. The mother of the new baby sat in the place of honour: her delivery was now six hours away, so she was counted as fit again. A guitar struck up a throbbing melody with a strange insistent rhythm in its incessant phrasing. Girls began to dance. I saw Mitza: she had donned her best frock—a cotton creation in red and white stripes. Her young, lithe body writhed and strained to the savage air; her arms, bare in the firelight, were miracles of grace as she raised them one at a time over her head. It seemed as if she held the melody there, then let it ripple to the earth through her body, for from her breasts to her hips and thighs ran fascinating undulating waves. “*Olé! Olé!*” said her friends, as the guitarist thrummed in increased tempo. Never did agile limbs move so nimbly in such fantastic measure, till Mitza sank to the ground exhausted. She subsided slowly before me, then leaned back her head till it gained the solid solace of my shoulder.

Now the entire tribe was on its feet. Those who were not dancing clapped their hands and stamped their feet—I was reminded of the *sardana* of Catalonia. They were

half-tipsy now—I had no idea that so many people could get drunk on forty pesetas! But wine is not the only potent influence: atmosphere counts more, and here the very air was electric with infectious and irresponsible gaiety. Even old El Manco was excited—from time to time he hooted like an owl, the call of his tribe.

“Only a gypsy wedding is better than a gypsy birth,” El Manco whispered. “Yours was not a real wedding, of course.” Just as well, I pondered, if it should have been ‘better’ than this!

The baby slept on its mother’s knee—it was still naked, I noted, so that the magic influence of the fire could reach it. The necessary adoration was not confined to the women—the men knelt to kiss its hand. No casual observer would believe it, but the gypsies are overwhelmingly fond of children: they are children mentally themselves, simple and subtle by turns.

I could stand no more of it: the savage throb of the guitar bit into my brain; the primitive cries were overpowering, the atmosphere too intense. Mitza, with the instinctive understanding of the lover, perceived my distress at the very moment when it first declared itself. She took me by the hand, and we slipped away unnoticed. The bacchanalian *fiesta* continued as we sought the comparative calm of our own tent.

I was very troubled as I lay down by Mitza’s side. It seemed incredible that a mere ten days ago I had never even met this girl of mine. I had accepted her on the spur of the moment at El Manco’s suggestion because she had appeared as a useful part of an essential scheme.

I had not considered her feelings—I am afraid that this is a failing of mine: when I am on the trail, I am so keen that I have small thought for other people.

I ought to have foreseen complications, but my mind was controlled by a single idea, and I had not. I had argued, it will be recalled, that Mitza was to be my temporary partner for a few days only—a mere assistant, nothing more. As I have confessed, my plan fell to pieces. I was genuinely fond of the girl, and she was obviously and hopelessly in love with me. I ought not to have been surprised at that: gypsy girls seldom see much of their husbands before marriage, but their temperament favours sudden and fierce affection.

The form of marriage did not trouble me or her—it was only a gypsy custom, without legal significance. I warned readers that a man of my profession can seldom act like the hero in a Ouida novel—I am amused how this type still prevails in so many modern stories. Properly, I suppose, I ought to have done the Decent Thing, and married Mitza formally. There were obvious and strong objections to this course, however: while I was posing as a gypsy, Mitza was the perfect companion and mate—but I had no intention of posing as a gypsy indefinitely, and I knew that Mitza would be miserable if condemned to conventional life in a London flat. Besides, I was already engaged to be married! Moralists will argue that I ought never to have entered into this liaison with Mitza: maybe they are right—though without her aid I might never have solved my first problem—but this argument would not help me in the inevitable parting with Mitza.

I *had* become her *rom*, and now I had to leave her. Before puritans condemn me, however, let them read on—and see the great importance my mission assumed. Maybe then, in proportionate perspective, my ‘sin’ with Mitza may not seem so overwhelming.

Yet I agree that I felt a cad as she clung to me, sobbing.

“You are going away, *rom*, I know it!” she cried.

“For awhile, Mitza,” I said. “You remember how we talked on our first night together—how I explained my task to you? You have helped me nobly, Mitza—together we have solved the mystery of your father’s death, and have avenged it. Now I have another problem to tackle.”

“Take me with you, *rom*,” she whispered. “I can help you again.”

“Not this time, Mitza,” I said. “This time I cannot go as a gypsy.”

“But take me with you!” she pleaded. “You cannot leave me here—I love you! I shall die if you leave me. All these years I have waited for my *rom* to come, and then you came. I do not care if you are really a *gorgio*—I love your white skin. Your chest is so hairy and strong—I can sleep when I snuggle close to you. I shall never sleep if you go away and leave me!” And her hot tears coursed over my shoulder.

Few men know what to do with a woman in tears. Mitza was sobbing out her heart, and I felt small and mean. I had used this girl, and now proposed to put her aside!

"Listen, Mitza," I said at last, desperate to arrest her tears. "I *must* go away to-morrow. But I will come back to you."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it, Mitza!"

"Then that is different. Now I can be happy again, waiting for you. If you say you will come back to me, then I know you will come. Where are you going?"

"First, to Salamanca."

"And how long will you be?"

"I don't know," I said. "We solved our first mystery quickly, in a week. The next stage may take two weeks, or three, or four."

"Four weeks? I cannot wait so long! No, I *will* not wait so long. If you are not back in two weeks, I shall come and find you."

"No!" I insisted.

"Yes!" she cried. "You may be in danger—there are many things in this business which I do not understand. Have no fear. If you are still plotting, I shall not burst in upon you and spoil your scheme. But I must *see* you, to be sure that you are safe. If after two weeks you have not returned, then watch the gypsy beggars of Salamanca—I shall be among them, to be near you."

Her lips, soft and thick, purred over my face, and her warm body was pressed against mine. For awhile we were quiet; I was glad at her new happiness, even if I had only postponed my problem.

"How will you go to Salamanca?" she whispered at length. "In your car?"

"Oh no," I said. "That old crock won't do for my next part. I shall take a 'bus to Pamplona and then go by train."

"Then what will you do with the car?"

"I thought to give it to El Manco, to let him sell it for what it would fetch."

"Will you give it to me?" she whispered. "And will you show me how to start it and how to stop it?"

"Of course, if you wish."

"Good! Ah, I remember that one of my cousins knows about cars—he also will teach me."

"But why—"

"I can come to you the quicker, should you need me."

Her devotion was overwhelming, and redoubled my shame. There was no coldness in my kisses as I embraced her, for my heart was warm towards her. The sounds of revelry had now ceased—the cask of wine emptied, the festivities had come to an abrupt end. Through the opening of our rough tent the moonlight beamed upon us, and the peace of the night was disturbed only by my eagerness for the days which lay ahead.

CHAPTER IX

MY TASK WAS now becoming plain, and at this stage I ought perhaps to sum up its implications. There was in Spain a Fascist plot to seize Gibraltar—I had heard of it before, but was now convinced that it was a reality. The attempt to murder me on its account was sufficient proof. It was a fantastic plot, and did not stand the slightest chance of success. The danger lay in the *attempt*. British public opinion is still easily stirred on imperial affairs, and Gibraltar is a touchy point. An attempt on Gibraltar would inevitably mean a new prejudice against Spain—at a time when Spain badly needed Britain's friendship. More than that, the attempt might have more serious international repercussions. This was a Fascist plot: the influence of Italy and Germany in Spanish Fascist circles cannot be denied—and the potential complications are obvious.¹

¹ I ought to make it quite clear that no responsible German or Italian knew anything at all about the plot. Nor, for that matter, did the Spanish Fascist leaders—they may have talked about the 'insult' of British ownership of Gibraltar, but the actual plot for its seizure was purely the conception of a group of youthful hotheads.

It would be as well to emphasize, too, that although Franco's supporters are called by the general term 'Fascists' by a section of the British Press, actually his rising was primarily an Army revolt. Army officers throughout history have formed a political clan in Spain, and have precipitated dozens of rebellions and civil wars. The Army clique had, as its natural allies, such right-wing elements as the Clericals (who saw all their traditional powers being taken away by the democratic Government), the Carlists (who have always joined in any rebellion as a method of reviving their 'lost cause'), the Monarchists (who naturally desired the overthrow of a

My task, therefore, was quite simple. I must prevent even the *attempt* on Gibraltar. So far as I could see, I must do it alone—official assistance was unthinkable even if obtainable. This aspect of the problem did not dismay me; I like playing a lone hand, and have carried off bigger jobs than this one promised to be. But I didn't know what lay ahead!

My immediate plans were adequate, I considered. Obviously I must get to the *inside* of the organisation. As a book hero I could have become a Spaniard; but my Spanish, although very good, was not perfect or fool-proof. I could, however, penetrate the confidence of a Fascist group either as an Italian or a German. My Italian was like my Spanish, but my German was perfect—I have a liberal admixture of German blood in my veins.

In my book *Spy* I have detailed my mixed parentage—son of an English father and an Alsatian mother. I have described my German cousins; one of them, Adolf Neumann, I had actually impersonated for two years

Republican Government) and the Fascists (who automatically opposed the Government because, although itself Liberal, it had come into power on the basis of a 'popular front' which included Communist, Anarchist, Syndicalist, and Socialist elements).

The Spanish Fascists, or Falangists, were only loosely organised—even the Fascist creed cannot surmount the intense provincial regionalism of Spain. Like other Spanish parties, it depended more on the personality of its leaders than on its programme. An occasional natural leader would form a strong local group, though maybe some of his opinions would be Fascist heresy. Similarly, in some towns, the younger men would be dissatisfied with the apparently feeble resistance to the rise of democratic Government after de Rivera's dictatorship, and would form extremist groups of their own. It was in one of these groups—within the Fascist party, but certainly unknown to its leaders—that the Gibraltar idea was germinated. B. N.

during the War. At that time he was an unwilling and unconscious accomplice, a prisoner of war in England. Now, however, I felt that I could count on his help, for Adolf is no Nazi or Fascist, and in his little Black Forest town is already suspected of 'incompatibility with the régime.'

I merely wanted to borrow his identity as a potential guarantee of good faith, in the very unlikely event of question being raised. As I had used his identity before, the necessary clothes and papers were readily procurable —Marshall and Mason had seen to that. When I made my second departure from the Hotel Perla at Pamplona, I was Herr Adolf Neumann, of Donaueschingen, Germany. As such I took the train to Salamanca.

A German in Spain attracts little attention. For two or three generations the Germans have pursued a perfectly legitimate policy of economic penetration into Spain. Several of the Spanish banks and many industrial enterprises are controlled by German capital. It was easy, therefore, to suggest a motive for my journey.

I knew Salamanca well: a glorious old city, teeming with history. It was not difficult to find the cafés frequented by the younger Fascist groups. As in most Continental countries, the cafés of Spain are the backbone of politics. They are certainly a label. If a man takes his drinks at a particular café, you know he is a Clerical; at another, then he is a Communist. An hour after arriving in Salamanca I was sipping coffee at a little resort in a narrow street just behind the arcaded Plaza Mayor.

The first stages of my advance were easy. Naturally, I was a Nazi: there may be subtle differences between the Nazi and Fascist creeds, but their methods at least are similar. For a previous exploit I had swatted up the patter, and on my journey a renewed study of *Mein Kampf* had refreshed my memory: I read it, by the way, in the *original*, not the watered version released for publication abroad. It would have been difficult *not* to get into conversation with the ardent spirits about me. On my first evening I was the centre of a lively group; on my second I was introduced to others as *a fraternal delegate from Germany*.

It was in this fashion that I met the youthful Señor Gil Castillo, and from that moment knew that I was pitted against a worthy adversary. He was not more than twenty-five, but he was clever and competent—and, for a Spaniard, remarkably energetic. He welcomed me in friendly fashion—the German names I mentioned were a powerful introduction. To drive home my advantage, I turned out a letter from my pocket to verify some quotation from it—a letter apparently from a Very High Personage indeed. But Castillo was no fool, nor was he a conspirator from a modern thriller; he did not suspect my *bona fides*, but he did not immediately make me his confidant.

My hints about finance helped more than I knew. Most Spanish political movements are short of cash, and most of them have drawn their financial inspiration from abroad. I threw out hints that I was in Spain on a special mission, and on my recommendation ample funds would be allo-

cated. I believe this was the deciding factor which led eventually to an invitation to Castillo's flat.

This particular phase of my story is not dramatic—it was a battle of wits, one of the contestants not knowing that he was fighting. A record of our conversation would fill a whole book: my advances were made very gradually, with hours of talk interspersed—talk about totalitarian states and other Fascist ideals. I was determined not to mention Gibraltar until I had a clear lead. In Castillo's flat I found it, for another map of Gibraltar was hanging on the wall. This was obviously my cue.

"That is a strange decoration, señor," I said, pointing to it. "Why do you torture yourself by a permanent reminder of that insult?"

"I do not need it as a reminder," he muttered.

"I can understand your chagrin," I continued. "Gibraltar is to you what the Polish Corridor is to us. But never fear, señor. Neither condition can survive."

"You believe that?" he asked, anxiously.

"I am certain. For the moment all is quiet in the Corridor. We bide our time—we must settle with Russia first. But our day will come. And as for Gibraltar—well, that is an affair between you and England alone. Thirty years ago Spanish aspirations towards Gibraltar would have been folly. But to-day times have changed. England is decadent. She wants peace, so she proclaims twice nightly; but she has proclaimed it so often that she assumes peace automatically, and has lost the will for war. Her empire is disrupted—a mere haphazard maze of states, with but a flimsy bond. Can you imagine, say,

the Australians going to war over the Polish Corridor? *Or Gibraltar?* No, we have taken England's measure. All you have to do is to speak firmly and loudly, and she will give in—she will give up anything rather than face war. Yes, Señor Castillo, Gibraltar is not so far removed from Spain as it used to be. Once you have cleared up Spain and have removed this Communist rabble—why, a strong and united Spain might easily demand the return of Gibraltar."

"Ah, I am glad to hear you talk like that," he cried, his eyes shining with excitement. "I have urged for a long time that we ought to tackle this problem. Always I am out-voted. My colleagues among the Fascist leaders are too cautious—they are thinking only of the internal affairs of Spain—they devote all their time to the combating of Communism. But my own ideas are wider. Suppose we regained Gibraltar—why, the whole of Spain would rally to us! Gibraltar is a continuous insult to Spanish pride—Spain would be at the feet of anyone who removed it. Oh, I have preached this idea—*why not take Gibraltar first?*

"An excellent idea, too, señor," I agreed. "But it differs slightly from mine. I talked of demanding Gibraltar—were you thinking of taking it by force?"

"Why not? Think of the honour it would bring to our cause!"

"Yes, yes, I appreciate that. But is it possible? Gibraltar is very strong—I have been there."

"So have I," he said. "I agree, it is very strong. But consider our advantages. The English defenders are

slack. They have held Gibraltar without a blow for over a hundred years. They are not expecting a blow—it would be child's play to surprise them. You, Señor Neumann, an old soldier, know the value of surprise. I agree that I would not care to mount a frontal assault on Gibraltar—with the British Navy in the bay! But by stealth—that is another matter."

"Yes, that is true. But how would you do it?"

"Gibraltar is lightly manned—a mere 5,000 soldiers. Sufficient for a frontal attack, maybe, but suppose the attack came from *within*? Oh, you have no conception how casual the English are in their supposed security. Every day thousands of Spanish workmen pass into Gibraltar from La Linea, and every evening they return. It would be easy for hundreds of our people to move among them. Every day hundreds of people land from ocean liners, to change on to other boats—Gibraltar is a sort of passenger junction for the Western Mediterranean. Our people could land, too, at the right moment. And, although the civilian population of Gibraltar is largely of Italian descent, there are thousands of Spanish there. A few additions to the Spaniards would not be noticed."

"I see! Yes, there is the possibility of a clever scheme there, Señor Castillo. A few hundred men *inside* the fortress, disguised as workmen—yes, that is an excellent beginning. Yet you must not underrate these British. Although they have passed their prime as a race, they are stubborn fighters—a few hundred disguised workmen will not capture Gibraltar."

“No, but they could open the gates to thousands more!”

“True! Yet even then there are difficulties. Your ‘workmen’ can only carry light arms—you have to carry fortifications of immense strength.”

“I have considered them. And I have a plan—a diversion, an attack in the rear.”

“An attack in the rear! But the British Fleet would surely prevent that!”

“The British Fleet would be powerless against the stroke I plan. Listen, Señor Neumann, I have talked freely with you—and with a reason. My colleagues, as I have said, refuse to discuss this scheme with me—they are near-sighted, and lacking in faith. But I myself can raise ample men for the exploit. I need two things, Señor Neumann—money and arms. So now I ask you—can you supply them?”

“It is not impossible,” I hedged. “It is understood, is it not, that neither I nor my country plays any part in this affair?”

“Of course,” he agreed. “You may be easy on that score. In fact, even if you give us no help, the plan goes forward. But your help would ensure our success. Why, I believe that one word from ——” (and he mentioned the ‘author’ of the forged letter I had produced)¹ “would rally even the waverers in our own party. Maybe then I would be allowed to draw on party funds.”

¹ For the sake of clarity we will give that Very High Personage a name. We will call him General Boring. The name is highly fictitious, and bears no relation to anything it resembles.

"It is not impossible," I repeated. "But first, of course, you would have to convince me as to the practicability of your scheme. Obviously we cannot risk the international complications which would arise from an abortive attempt."

"I agree," he said, "and I know that I can convince you. For two years I have been studying this problem. I know every nook and cranny of Gibraltar; for months my agents have been among the workmen of Gibraltar—they are there now. I assure you that I have a plan of campaign which *cannot* fail. To-morrow my chief of staff shall expound it to you."

With that I was well content, and willingly endured a second dose of Communist castigation and a repetition of the advantages of a Spanish capture of Gibraltar. When I got back to my hotel, I chuckled aloud in my pleasure. This was *real* Intelligence work—simple, effective, and non-sensational. Human nature is astonishingly plausible; association of ideas is overwhelmingly powerful in its effect on the mind. Certain creeds are associated with certain countries, and inhabitants of those countries are automatically accepted as apostles of the creeds. If I were to attempt to penetrate the Communist Party in England, I might be received with some suspicion, but if I were a Russian I would be welcomed with open arms as an authority.

Names, too, have a cumulative psychological effect. I had talked freely and intimately of the German leaders—and that personal 'letter' was obvious confirmation of claims I never made. Yes, on the whole I was pleased

with my performance. I was an actor, true, but it was no foolproof part I played. I think I can say that my personality is friendly, and I am fairly good at winning confidence. I had been in Salamanca for ten days only, and to-morrow the details of the scheme would be revealed to me—this represented good going, even allowing for my advantages. I suspect that the principal influence, however, was financial—it usually is. I had been spending money freely, and had hinted at grants and subsidies which were available on my recommendation.

I met Castillo at the café the following evening, and in due course he presented me to a young man who, although in civilian clothes, appeared to be an engineer officer. His name was Vicente, and Castillo referred to him grandiloquently as his 'chief of staff.' The two evidently had a considerable influence over the younger Fascists of the city—Castillo had a reputation as an orator, which I could well understand—and they had constituted themselves a kind of 'ginger group' to their central association.

I studied Vicente keenly as we talked casually over our drinks. My impression was that he was a keener soldier than Fascist, but had espoused the cause because of the opportunities it offered. Quite frankly, I liked the man. It was soon obvious that he was no fool, and he had a ready wit, which promised well for emergency decisions. Yet, nevertheless, Castillo was the driving force of the plot—without him it would come to nothing.

We adjourned to Castillo's flat, and I prepared for inward thrills as I realised my goal. The ball had run

very well for me this time, I mused, as Castillo busied himself with drinks. Seldom, if ever, have clues been presented and mysteries unravelled in such logical sequence. I ought to have been suspicious: it is just when you are pleased with Fate that she deals you a treacherous blow.

Need I say that I was listening keenly? As an actor I was a quick study, and I prepared to commit to memory the essentials of Vicente's information. I had won his confidence like Castillo's by my free and intimate mention of great names. That forged letter from 'General Boring' was an inspiration.

We were sitting in comfortable chairs, smoking furiously, when Vicente led up to his subject.

"Señor Castillo has told me who you are, Señor Neumann," he said, "and how you may be able to help us."

"Privately—quite privately," I put in. "And I promise nothing."

"Of course, that is understood," he agreed. "We need not debate the moral effects of the seizure of Gibraltar? Spain would rally to us—and I agree with you that England would do no more than appeal to the League of Nations."

I am confident that both of them really believed this! It demonstrates a common continental opinion of our policy of peace—and indicates that the country which eventually twists the lion's tail a little too hard is going to receive a sudden and very unexpected shock!

"But I am more concerned with the practical side," he went on. "I believe that Gibraltar can be taken—

and, once taken, held. Surprise is our weapon, of course, the only possible weapon. The English have been so long undisturbed that it should be easy to surprise them.

"I have been studying Napoleon's campaigns, and one of his principles supplies the key to the problem—a diversion before the real attack, to draw off the enemy attention and force. Gibraltar offers unique possibilities—I have planned a diversion which will not only surprise but mystify the defenders—they will not know whence the blow comes. Yet it will be so powerful that it may prove decisive of itself. It is simple, and it is already prepared—it only awaits the moment."

"Go on, señor," I said. "You interest me greatly"—which was certainly true! "Describe this diversion to me."

"You have heard of the Gibraltar tunnel?" he queried, and I pricked up my ears. But before I could answer the door burst open, and a young man staggered in. His face was pale and alarmed, and one arm hung limply by his side. I recognised him—he had been at the café earlier in the evening.

"Moreno!" cried Castillo. "What is wrong?"

"There was a little trouble at the Communist meeting," the new-comer muttered.

"What? But I told you not to go there!" Castillo stormed.

"Yes, chief, I know. But they dared us to go."

"So this is your idea of discipline! You obey Communists rather than your leaders! Very well, we will see about this! Well, what happened?"

"The usual—taunts—reprisals—shootings."

"Any casualties?"

"Yes. I think two Communists are dead."

"Oh, you fools! Not because you shot Communists, but because you do it too soon! There will be plenty of time to shoot Communists later on! Must you provoke an outbreak before we are ready?"

"Sorry, chief; it just—well, it just happened."

"I'll see that it doesn't happen again," Castillo shouted. "How can we win, if our discipline—" But he halted abruptly as Moreno sank to the floor in a faint.

We picked him up, to find a bullet wound through his arm. I took charge automatically—the others stood by and took my orders. If an Englishman is present at an emergency in a Latin country, he generally does take charge.

"I take it that you do not wish him to see a doctor?" I said. "But he ought to—have you a discreet man?"

"Certainly—more than one," Castillo said, and got busy on the 'phone. Moreno had now regained consciousness, and my tight bandage numbed the pain in his arm. The doctor lived only just around the corner, and in five minutes was with us. He approved my administrations, ordered that Moreno should not be moved, and promised a second visit in the morning.

Under my breath I was cursing furiously. Naturally, the coming of Moreno had halted abruptly Vicente's exposition of the Gibraltar plot. I tried to be patient as Castillo cross-questioned his wounded lieutenant about the Communist meeting. Then he allowed the miserable

Moreno to be at ease on the couch, and I hoped to pick up the threads of our conversation again. It seemed, however, that Vicente was reluctant to speak in front of Moreno—it was very evident that, although dozens of Fascists knew that there *was* a Gibraltar plot, mighty few of them knew anything of the details.

Gradually, and almost in a whisper, I was leading the conversation back to its point of interruption. Suddenly Castillo rushed to the open window and gazed down to the street below.

“A car!” he cried. “Yes—name of God, the Civil Guards!” Then, turning to the unhappy Moreno, he stormed: “Miserable that you are—you have been recognised and followed here! Oh, fool! Fool!”

He rushed to the door, and locked it. Then to his desk, where he pulled some papers from a drawer.

“Quick!” he shouted to Vicente. “Burn these!”

In a few seconds they were burning in the empty grate—and the Civil Guards were banging on the door.

“Open, in the name of the Republic!”

“Have you finished?” Castillo whispered.

“No. Don’t open!”

“Open, in the name of the Republic!”

Castillo made no reply, but the next sound was the smashing of matchwood, and three Civil Guards burst into the room. They seemed surprised to find themselves outnumbered, but they were armed and we, apparently, were not.

One of them strode to the wretched Moreno, sitting abjectly on the sofa.

"Luiz Moreno," he said, "in the name of the Republic I arrest you on the charge of murder."

"No!" cried Moreno. "That is not true—not murder!"

"You can argue that before the magistrate. Come along—no resistance, or there'll be trouble. The rest of you—come along as well."

"What? Why?" cried Castillo.

"Accessory after the fact. Maybe before the fact as well. Don't argue—come along."

"But this is illegal," Castillo protested. "I know nothing of this affair at all."

"Satisfy the magistrate as to why you were harbouring the murderer, and he will let you go. I'm not arguing, I'm carrying out my orders—and you're coming along."

One of the Civil Guards was at the grate, and had seized the fragments of paper which Vicente had not quite destroyed. Then he searched the desk hurriedly.

"Never mind—we'll leave a man to do that," said the first Guard, who wore a sergeant's stripes. "Come along, all of you."

"Excuse me," I put in, "but I take it I am not included in your invitation. I am not Spanish, but a visitor."

"Ah! Your papers?"

I handed him my passport. "Ah, German!" he ejaculated. Then to my horror I remembered that I had placed my precious forged letter from General Boring in the passport for safe keeping. It fell out, and the sergeant picked it up.

"Ah, German," he repeated. "And you carry a letter from General Boring, and are found in a haunt of

Fascist murderers! Yes, certainly you must come along as well!"

There was no help for it, in the face of three rifles. They marched us down the stairs and bundled us into the waiting car. The drive was surprisingly long, and we were hustled into a building so hurriedly that I had no opportunity to take my bearings.

I noticed that most of the men about were in plain clothes—and then I was flung into a miserable cellar. It was unlighted, but the incompetent fools had not even searched me, and I still had my matches! Looking round, I decided that this was more like a coal cellar than a police cell. Well, the prison accommodation of Salamanca might be taxed by the political unrest, but I was not going to submit to such conditions without protest.

I banged hard at the door, and in a few minutes a man appeared, carrying a storm lantern.

"Look here," I said, sternly, "I'm not staying in this. I'm not a Spaniard—I'm a German subject: you can't treat me like this. I demand to see my consul. What sort of a police cell do you call this, anyway?"

"Police cell?" he echoed, a wealth of scorn in his voice. "Why, you poor simp!"

And, as I looked at him, I saw that I was!

CHAPTER X

A FEW WEEKS LATER, and I would not have been so easily deceived. By that time the subterfuge had been commonly adopted by both sides, but at Salamanca it was still new to me. In the turmoil of Spain, the one uniform which retained some respect was that of the Civil Guards. Consequently the uniform became highly popular with extremist factions, who 'forged' it, freely. If Fascists wished to avenge themselves on Communists, or *vice versa*, they would disguise themselves as Civil Guards, take their unsuspecting opponents into 'custody,' and then wreak their vengeance. An ingenious idea, and simple—and I had fallen blindly into the trap! No wonder my gaoler sneered at me as a 'poor simp.'

So I found myself a prisoner of the Communists. I was not so concerned about my personal position—in emergency, I could always tell the truth about myself—but was highly annoyed at the intervention which had robbed me of my prize. Another ten minutes, and the unfortunate Moreno could have been shot through both arms; another hour, and the entire force of Civil Guards, real or pseudo, could have raided Castillo's flat.

In the meantime there was nothing to be done. The Communists evidently did not believe in spoiling their captives by the luxuries of modern prisons. I sat on the

stone floor and leaned against the dirty wall: despite the heat of the day, the cellar was damp and cold. Two or three rats scuttled familiarly about the stone floor; it did not promise to be a restful night.

It wasn't, and my temper was ruffled when, ravenously hungry, I was led from the cellar about the middle of the following morning. My captors were doing things in style—the room had the atmosphere, if not the formality, of a court martial.

"So!" exclaimed its 'president,' a youthful man of the student type: he was better dressed than the rest—he wore a collar. "So, this is the German agent!"

"Rubbish!" I retorted. "I am only a casual visitor."

"Casual, eh?" he echoed. "It was an accident that you should be discovered at a Fascist headquarters, was it? It was an accident that you should be found in the company of murderers? That you should yourself have dressed the wounds of the murderer? This does not sound very casual."

"Nevertheless, it is true."

"And this letter is 'casual' too?" he sneered, waving General Boring's 'introduction' before me. "I know a little German, but I have had it translated lest my own should be erratic. I find it very interesting—*very* interesting."

"I can explain all that—" I began.

"No doubt. Everything can be 'explained' by a ready tongue. Well, you had better do your explaining quickly, for you will die to-night. Your confederate, Moreno, has already fired his last assassin's shot."

"But this is illegal!" I protested. "You have no right——"

"These are no times to talk of rights," he countered. "You and your friends had no right to murder two of my comrades last night, but you did. Your death will but be justice—we can expect none from officials. Here there is a great bias to the Right; thus we must make our own justice. There is no argument and no appeal. You are a German agent—we have long suspected the activities of you and your like. You have come to encourage a Fascist rising against a democratic Government—your own papers condemn you. You have promised money to the Fascist cause. For several days you have been watched as you consort with these wretched men—including the actual murderer. Your implication is clear beyond doubt. Probably you urged him on to his crime. Certainly you planned a far greater crime—and for that alone you must die! Before that you will be given an opportunity to talk. I advise you to talk quickly!"

His eyes were gleaming with vengeance, the eyes of a fanatic. He was dangerous—I saw that it was useless to argue with him. I had to play my trump card at once.

"Señor," I said, "you are very much mistaken in your conclusions. May I speak to you alone?"

"Well, you are cool!" he ejaculated. "Twice my size, and you want to speak to me alone!"

"You need have no fear," I argued. "You can sit with a revolver on your table. You shall even have guards at the door, and we will converse in German. A moment ago you invited me to talk. Well, I am prepared to talk,

but not to address a public meeting"—and with a wave of the hand I indicated the motley collection about him.

He hesitated, but agreed. I felt on easier ground—at least I had only one man to conquer, not a crowd. I had anticipated a noisy and contradictory committee, but the Communist discipline was apparently strong. In a few minutes their leader and I were alone in the room, except for armed guards by the door.

Then in clear and simple German, I explained who I was. Naturally, I did not mention the Gibraltar plot, but told him that I was an Englishman investigating the Fascist menace on behalf of a democratic newspaper. He was suspicious, but obviously impressed by my story.

"This is a fantastic tale," he said at last. "Nevertheless, I am no murderer, like these Fascists. I only want justice. You will not die to-night. We shall investigate your story. If it is true, then of course you will be safe, and more. But if not—I warn you!—then we shall know for certain that you are a spy!"

At least his doubt was so far aroused that he ordered me to be taken to a better room. This was a large compartment on the first floor, plainly but reasonably furnished. Naturally, I examined it with a view to escape, but gave up the idea. The window was firmly barred, and gave on to the interior *patio*, which was swarming with men. The door was firm and substantial. I appeared to be in an old house which had once been a noble residence. Looking about the room, I admired its dignified proportions: at one end was an enormous fireplace almost of mediaeval type—standing in it, I could catch

an aggravating glimpse of blue sky up the substantial chimney.

My treatment was now that of a first-class prisoner. My only complaint was the stuffiness of the room, due to the perpetually closed window. But I was fed well and—essence of luxury to a prisoner!—was even handed an English newspaper. I could not resist a chuckle as I sat in such strange circumstances reading the first scores of the cricket season.

For two days I lazed in the room, utterly bored. If they had only put Castillo and Vicente in the same room! Or were they already dead? But to ask for them would be to throw serious doubts on my story—and, while it was important to gather details of the Gibraltar plot, it was far more important that I should escape alive.

On the third day the door was suddenly flung open, and the 'president' of the court martial entered, followed by an armed guard. I suspected trouble when I saw his eyes, flaming with madness.

"So you thought to trick me!" he shouted, almost beyond control. "You will find that tricking does not pay! You swore that you were Captain Bernard Newman, correspondent of the *News-Courier*. You may be interested to know that he was found dead three weeks ago! And now you will soon follow him!"

"No, no, you've got it all wrong!" I exclaimed. "I can explain—"

"I have had enough explanations," he cried. "I suspected you from the first moment. This is the truth,

not your fantastic yarn." And he waved again that fatal letter from General Boring.

Too late I saw the snag. He *wanted* to believe that I was a German agent. It would be a great advantage to his side—to catch out an active agent, with incriminating documents in his possession. I saw, too late, that I ought to have told him the whole story, not half of it. And now he would not hear me.

After he had gone, I banged on the door, but no one came. I gave it up—after all, you cannot argue with a fanatic—I must let his temper cool. But an hour later two guards led me out of the house. To its rear was a large garden, enclosed within stone walls. Apparently the house was on the outskirts of the city, for I could see no others immediately near.

One of the men handed me a spade.

"Dig," he commanded.

"What shall I dig?" I asked.

"Why, what do you think? Your grave, of course!"

"Ah, so this is where I am to be murdered," I said, bitterly.

"Murdered—who talks of murder?" he asked, facetiously. "You will be shot while trying to escape."

I thought of refusing, but he advanced his bayonet till it actually penetrated my flesh. Then I reflected that I could do with the exercise. At any time there might be dirty work.

Yet, as I dug, my spirits sank. To make a man dig his own grave is the supreme torture. Hitherto I had refused to consider the prospect of death, but now it seemed

uncomfortably near. The ground was soft, and it was easy to dig down to a depth of three or four feet. Sweating in the heat, I withdrew to consider my handiwork. My guards admired it.

"Yes, it is neat and tidy," one of them said. "Most people get flustered, and can't keep a straight line. Yes, it is a good grave. Of course, the earth is soft. There are a lot of worms in this ground, by the way, and we cannot provide you with a coffin."

Now I was certain that this *was* organised torture. I could stand it; I had faced torture before. Yet, back in my room again, I was troubled. I was not afraid of death. I have found that fear of death is exaggerated. During the War, men did not fear death so much as being hurt. I did not want to die—I had much to live for. Margaret, in England, was waiting for me: there was happiness ahead. And I *could* have retired from all this business years ago.

My principal chagrin, however, spread itself around my failure. Deliberately I had chosen to play a lone hand, and I had been wrong. Had I kept Marshall posted with my discoveries, then I would have been happier. True, I had had small opportunity of reporting Vicente's opening sentences! Now, if I must die, then the knowledge I had gained must die with me.

Many times I have faced what appeared to be certain death; maybe I have got too used to the situation. Normally I would never have thought of letters home, but now I thought of Margaret. I *must* write to her: she had been out of England when I left so suddenly,

though Marshall would have given her what news he could. Yet I could not simply disappear—I must write some message, some words of comfort. If I thought hard, I might even send real news: maybe I could so feign a headache that they would give me aspirin: an aspirin dissolved in water makes excellent invisible ink. And with a meal yesterday I had been given lemon—I could ask for it again: surely they would not refuse a condemned man his last request—a lemon is also a useful secret ink. Or, of course, I could use urine.

I banged at the door persistently till one of my guards appeared. Then I demanded paper and ink. If I could only get a pen, I needed no secret ink at all. I had only to give the hint in the text of the letter: 'Sorry my writing is so bad, but the pen is scratchy,' and Marshall would be hot on the trail. For when you write with a pen, even if it carries no ink, you make faint scratches on the paper. They are invisible to the naked eye, but an iodine vapour bath reveals their secrets—minute particles of iodine settle in the tiny scratches. I doubted if my captors would think of this—but Marshall certainly would.

"What do you want paper and ink for?" my guard asked, suspiciously.

"That's obvious, surely," I said. "You're going to kill me—surely you will let me write home to my family."

"What, and give us away!" he sneered. "You fool! Don't worry—you're going to die by accident! Men who die by accident don't have time to write last letters home." And he slammed and locked the door.

This was very galling. I was simply to disappear from the map—an exit which did not appeal to my dramatic instinct. I hate failure above all things, and if I were so tamely eliminated I would definitely have failed.

The very uncertainty was nerve-racking. The first time I had been condemned to death¹ I had at least known the time of death's approach. But these people seemed to muddle their organisation—they had simply said 'at night.' The absence of an evening meal was significant—why waste good food on a man who was to die?

Night fell, and my courage wavered. Sometimes I persuaded myself that this was unreal, a bluff—surely I could not be executed for something I had never done! Surely these people dare not shoot me—when I had worked desperately against their enemies and mine! They *must* listen to me, then surely they must be convinced. But that was my trouble. Only one man appeared to have authority, and he would not listen.

But two hours later I had to face stark realities. There was excitement in the *patio* outside my window. I could not see what was happening, but a few minutes later came the unmistakable sound of a shot. Was it for Castillo or Vicente? Either of them, I knew, would die without a squeal. And whose turn would it be next?

The suspense was maddening, and I sensed my diminishing control. But suddenly came a sound which made every nerve tingle—the hoot of an owl, faint, but so clear that it seemed to be in the room. After a moment's

¹ See *Spy*.

startled hesitation, I rushed to the chimney—for the hoot of the owl was the tribal call of *El Manco's* family.

“Mitza!” I whispered. “Is it you?”

“Yes, *rom.*”

“Oh, great girl! Look, can you get a rope—quickly?”

“I have one already. I was coming down to you.”

“No. Can you find something to fasten it to?”

“Yes. There is an attic window here, with bars.”

“Good—quickly, Mitza.”

I had forgotten that the fourteen days which Mitza had specified had now expired—I had almost forgotten Mitza, indeed, in my thoughts of Margaret. But now I was exhilarated at the prospect of action. Yet my risk was by no means over. At any moment my guards might come for me—and it was not going to be an easy job to climb the chimney. It was wide and substantial, but I am of hefty build. Yet it was my only chance, and had to be tried. Had I had more time, I would have chosen a safer release—I would have sent Mitza for the Civil Guards. They, although they might be hesitant as to who was their legal chief, had only one opinion about people who committed murder under the cover of their honoured uniform!

The seconds passed, and the sweat broke on my brow. The corridor outside was never completely quiet, as men passed and repassed. Another few minutes! It would be too cruel if they came for me now!

A cloud of soot fell into the great fireplace, and I saw a dangling end of rope. I tied a handkerchief firmly over my nose and mouth, and prepared for an ordeal.

At first the chimney was wide; I climbed easily, my feet finding a purchase on the rough stones. Breathing became difficult as clouds of soot enveloped me. Yet I dared not halt to allow it to settle: at any moment they might come, and a bullet up the chimney could not miss me. It would be a dirty death!

The chimney narrowed; I felt its touch on every side. I could scarcely bend my knees to grip the stones, and depended entirely on the rope. There came a glorious moment when my hands gripped the coping of the chimney, and my nostrils breathed fresh air. Mitza ripped the handkerchief from my face. Then I found that my broad shoulders were jammed between the chimney's final stones!

I wriggled and strained, but imprisoned myself only the more firmly. Too late I saw my mistake—I ought to have spread myself corner to corner across the chimney.

“Mitza! Push me down—I can’t move!”

“What, *rom?*” she cried, in dismay.

“Yes, I’m stuck. Hit me on the shoulders—hard!”

She hesitated, but obeyed me.

“Harder! With all your weight!”

She leaned on my shoulders, and I felt myself slipping. I kept my grip of the rope, and as soon as I could feel an inch of clearance on either side I slewed myself round, so that my shoulders stretched from corner to corner. A final strain and a desperate wriggle, and I was standing on the flat roof beside her.

“Mitza!” I whispered. “I will never forget what you have done for me this day! Now lead on!”

We moved cautiously across the roof.

"They are all in the *patio* or in the garden at the back," she whispered. "We can climb down the rain pipe in the front."

We did, carefully and cautiously. I was so excited that I forgot to think ahead, but I found a new confidence in Mitza—a girl who had the foresight to bring a rope to the top of a chimney was not likely to overlook the next step.

"Come!" she said, as I joined her in the road at the foot of the pipe. She took me by the hand, and we ran; half a mile down the road was a farm-track to the left, and she led me down it. Between two round and conical haystacks I found the old Hispano-Suiza awaiting us!

I made automatically for the driving seat, but Mitza was before me.

"You are tired and strained," she said, pulling me down into the other seat. A few seconds later we were feeling our way, without headlights, along the farm-track; in three minutes we were flashing down a good road, our lights now on, at forty-five miles an hour. And at the wheel of the car sat the girl who, a fortnight earlier, had asked me to show her how to start it and how to stop it!

I had lots of questions to ask, but first we must get well clear. The fresh night air filled my lungs, and I sneezed and coughed the soot from my nose and mouth.

After half an hour Mitza turned off the main road, and threaded country lanes with uncanny instinct. At last she halted the old car.

"We shall be safe here," she said. "They will never trace us. There is a camp site here." Then she flung her arms about me. "Oh, my *rom*!"

And there was no simulation about the kisses I pressed upon her warm lips. For the moment I forgot everything except that this girl had risked herself to snatch me from an unpleasant death. We sat in the back seat of the car—the night was too far advanced to think of pitching a tent: an old rug shielded us from the freshening breeze. We drew warmth from one another as her body pressed close to mine.

At last her hungry passion was satisfied, and we began to talk of the excitements of the night.

"Tell me everything, Mitza!" I commanded. "It was magnificent—I want to hear all about it."

But suddenly she stiffened; her tongue, which had whispered words of passionate love, seemed to freeze. Without warning she burst into tears, and beat my chest with her hands.

"Oh, my *rom*!" she cried. "Do not kill me! Do not beat me!"

"Mitza!" I said, astounded. "Kill you? Beat you? Why, never did I love you so much as at this moment! Beat you—after what you have done for me!"

"But I have not told you, *rom*. Oh, do not throw me away from you—I did it for you!"

"But, Mitza, what do you mean?"

"The man—I had to find out where you were: I had no money to bribe him—I had to give myself to him! *Rom, rom!* I did it for you, I swear it! Forgive, forgive!"

"Mitza!" I tried to calm her. "Have no fear; whatever you did to-night was for me. There is no question of forgiveness—I owe everything to you. Now, tell me—from the beginning. When did you leave your uncle?"

"Yesterday—no, it is now the day before yesterday," she said. Then she fought for a moment to control her sobs. "I told you I would wait fourteen days for you. Yet I had to come at the thirteenth—I could not wait. A pain in my heart told me that all was not well with you."

"Did you come to Salamanca by car?"

"Yes. All these thirteen days I have been driving it about—at first my cousin showed me how."

"But even now it's far from clear," I said. "You knew I was going to Salamanca. But, when you got there, how did you, alone, discover where I was?"

"Not alone," she corrected. "I am a Romany. There are many of my kind in Salamanca. Gypsies are everywhere in Spain. They are loyal to their race. I had a hundred helpers in the city—better than any police force in the world. It was a gypsy fiddler in a café who told me that you had often been there, and how you had gone away with this Señor Castillo—who had since been reported missing. It was a gypsy beggar who told me of the raid on Castillo's flat by the Civil Guards—except that he said that he knew the face of every *tricornio* in Salamanca, but did not know these."

"I was puzzled, but old Diego, who is the *puro Rom* of the gypsy *barrio* by the banks of the Tormes, he explained things to me. The men could not be Civil Guards, he

said: otherwise, Castillo would be in prison—whereas he had been reported to the Civil Guards as missing. So, he argued, other men had disguised themselves as Civil Guards. Who would do it? Castillo was a well-known Fascist, he said, so obviously the men must be Communists or Anarchists. He was quite sure, since there had been shootings of Communists by Fascists the night you disappeared, and the capture of Castillo was obviously revenge."

It seemed to me that the gypsy Diego had a wider and deeper intelligence than I had!

"He sent off others of his tribe to spy out Communist haunts," Mitza continued. "A gypsy shoe-black in a Communist café heard a whispered mention of prisoners in a house on the Plasencia road, and a gypsy copper-smith found the house they spoke of. Old Diego could do no more for me, but I was very grateful."

I should think so! Mitza was right—the finest police force in the world, from a standing start, could not have equalled this feat of detection on the part of the gypsies. It really deserves a fuller chronicle than I have given it.

"I was puzzled how to get into the house to find you. I despaired of getting you out, but I wanted to come to you, to die with you. I went to the house, begging. One man turned me away, but another spoke to me. I know his type—it is everywhere: he is of the crowd who imagines that a gypsy girl is for the pleasure of *paillos*. We have a reply for these men—it is one of the first things our mothers teach us: it is not pretty, but it silences them. But to-day it was I who was silent. I had

to be silent. If I had money, I would have bribed him. Oh, my *rom*, do not send me away because I did this!"

"Go on, Mitza. I swear I will not send you away."

"He took me down the road, into a field where there is a barn," she went on, as I comforted her. "Then he began to talk—you know what he said? Oh, I was nearly sick as his hands pawed my breasts! But I, too, talked. Was it true what the people in Salamanca were saying—that a German was held in the house? How did I know that? he asked sharply. I said I had heard it in a café. I said that I had never seen a German—could I not see him? He said, no. Then he refused to talk of the German, and returned to me. He was my only chance, *rom*—I just *had* to find out where you were, to come to you. So I let him—take me. Oh, my shame! Never, never, will I forget that moment!"

She sobbed in my arms afresh, and I could feel that she was trembling. I comforted her gently.

"But at least he paid for his pleasure, if pleasure it was," she continued at last. "As we lay, we talked again about the German prisoner.

"'No, you will not see him,' he said, 'for he is to die to-night.'

"I think my heart must have stopped beating, for I could not reply.

"'He swears he is not German, but English,' he said again. 'Anyway, he is a spy, and he dies.'

"'But he may escape,' I whispered.

"'Escape!' he cried. 'Look!—and he got up and led me to the door of the barn, whence we could see the house.

‘He is in that corner room, on the first floor. His window and door are barred. Only if he can fly can he escape—through the chimney, which is large.’

“And, *rom*, my dead heart beat within me, for at last I had hope. You can guess the rest—I went back to old Diego to collect the car, and he gave me the rope.”

“He shall not lose by it,” I promised. “But there is one man who shall. This man who”—but my lips would not mouth it—“this man—of the barn? Do you know his name, or would you know him again? If so, he is going to answer for this!”

“He *has* answered, *rom*,” she said, quickly. “A gypsy girl who is married does not endure these things lightly. When he had showed me your room and told me about the chimney, I knew that he could be of no more use to me. So I enticed him back to our bed of straw. And there he lies, covered with the straw. Look, *rom!* Strike a match —here are some.”

I struck a light, and she pushed aside the rug and pulled her *churi* from her stocking: the grooves of the dagger were still stained with blood!

I was silent for a while, amazed at the powerful and primitive instincts of this girl, who counted murder smaller fault than seduction. She was racked with sorrow because she had given herself to this wretch, desperate as was her case. But for his death she had not a particle of remorse.

She misinterpreted my silence, and clung to me again in passionate sobs. But I reassured her, running my fingers through her wild hair, kissing and caressing her.

Her nerves were so strained that I was alarmed, and was not happy until I had soothed her to a brief sleep.

But this incident ought to be illuminating to those who imagine that gypsy morals are loose and frail! A more sophisticated girl would never have confessed to me at all.

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At the first stroke of dawn we set off, and I did not halt till we got to Plasencia. The Communists had not attempted to take my money, but had naturally possessed themselves of my pocket-book, which contained my papers—and the letter of credit which Marshall had forwarded to me in Neumann's name. I had only a few pounds in my pockets, so at Plasencia I halted to put through a 'phone call to Marshall. I told him all my news, briefly, and then wrote it out in detail while I waited for him to wire out to me a substantial supply of cash. Mitza had brought my British passport and other papers, which I had left with her.

I also asked Marshall to send a private agent who spoke Spanish at once to Salamanca, to watch the situation there—particularly to keep me apprised of news of Castillo and Vicente, if any! I gave Marshall an address which would find me.

Then I hurried on. I was concerned for Mitza. I was safe—far beyond the reach of Salamanca Communists. But her case was different. The body of the man she had killed might be discovered to-day or next month, but always there was potential danger. The old Hispano-Suiza rattled and squeaked as we sped to the south.

We attracted too much attention. I had, of course, got rid of the soot, and had bought new clothes. But a *gorgio* and a Romany girl together are conspicuous—our trail would be too easy to follow.

"I know the herbs," Mitza said, eagerly. "Oh, *rom*, become a gypsy again."

"A temporary gypsy this time, Mitza," I smiled, as she began to pitch our tent for the night. "If I wash my hands and face in coffee, and add a layer of dust, that will do for now."

We ate our simple meal, and lay down together. She clung to me in undisguised adoration.

"I have dreamed of the day when you would become a gypsy again, *rom*," she whispered. "You will not leave me this time?"

"No," I promised. "This time we go together."

But it was not until the morning that she asked *where* we were going.

"Where?" I echoed. "Still south. We are going to Gibraltar!"

CHAPTER XI

“YOU HAVE HEARD of the Gibraltar tunnel?” Vicente had asked, as he had begun to outline that ‘diversion’ which might indeed prove so overwhelming that alone it might cause the fall of Gibraltar. “It is already prepared—it only awaits the moment,” he had said.

Yes, I had heard of the Gibraltar tunnel, but counted it a legend. You remember the form of the story? Once, so scientists tell us, the Mediterranean was a great lake, and Gibraltar was joined up to Africa. When, by the slow erosion of the sea, the low land was eaten up, so as to join the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, Gibraltar was left almost an island—a little bit of Africa attached to Europe. Certainly Gibraltar is connected with Europe only by a flimsy spit of low ground. Stranded on the rock were a colony of apes, of a species common on the African shores opposite. Sometimes these apes disappeared; sometimes, so inhabitants of the Rock declared, other full-grown apes appeared—the number of the colony varied from week to week. Only one explanation was logical—that under the narrow straits was a tunnel, through which monkeys, at least, could pass.

Stern science now proved that the apes must have been introduced into Gibraltar by the Romans or the Moors, for no fossil remains of earlier periods have been found.

Yet this does not weaken the form of the legend. Although dozens of parties have sought for the tunnel and have failed to find it, there must be hundreds of people in Gibraltar who still believe in its existence. They include members of the garrison. Any man who has served at Gibraltar will assure you of one fact—that one day you may find dozens of apes, whereas the next you will search the entire Rock and not come across a single one. True, there are plenty of caves and crannies in Gibraltar, but it is not large—a mere two and a half miles long by a mile wide—and I have heard of considerable parties which have searched the Rock thoroughly without finding a trace of its colony of Barbary apes.

I left Mitza with the old car at La Linea, just inside Spain, while I made my first enquiries. There was a small gypsy *barrio* there where she would find hospitality. She watched me go with some misgivings, but I promised an early return.

First I called on a friend who is on the staff of the Governor. Although I had washed a dozen times, so that the worst effects of the coffee stains had gone, I was not quite up to the usual standard of visitors to Government House; my ready-made clothes were of poor fit and quality, and the door-keeper legitimately gave me askant glances.

“Look here,” I said to my friend, “I don’t want to be an alarmist, but are you quite happy about the Rock?”

“Happy about the Rock?” he cried, amazed. “What the hell do you mean?”

"About its defences. In the event of trouble, can you hold it?"

"Of course!"

"You're sure that long acceptance of a situation hasn't made you slack and casual?" I suggested.

"You ought to know that Gibraltar can't stagnate, if only because of its position. Why, cast your mind back a few months, to the dangerous moments of the Abyssinian War. Maybe England and Italy were nearer to war then than most people know—our naval friends at Malta tell some queer stories. Supposing there had been a scrap—what kudos for Musso if he could have taken Malta *and* Gibraltar! But don't worry, boy. It's easy to do both—on paper, when everybody about you agrees with your dreams. But we were ready. I think myself that war between England and Italy would have been a tragedy, but I can tell you this—that if Benito *had* chanced his arm, he wouldn't have taken Gib. I'll say this, too—that so long as Britain rules the waves (just the waves about here, I mean) then *nobody* will ever take Gibraltar."

"I see. You are confident that *no* land attack could take you by surprise?"

"Absolutely."

"And what about an attack from inside?"

"What? Elevate yourself, bo', elevate yourself!"

"Supposing a few hundred armed Spaniards got loose in the town?"

"The police would deal with them!" he said, grimly.

"But suppose they broke open the frontier at La Linea, and let thousands more in?"

"Look here, boy," he smiled. "I can't reveal to you the secrets of the defensive schemes of Gibraltar, and you know it. But I can tell you this—the first scheme to deal with such a contingency as you describe was drawn up about one hundred and fifty years ago! And it has been kept up to date. Does that satisfy you?"

"Quite!" I agreed. "Now, what about the tunnel?"

"What tunnel? Oh, you mean the Monkeys' Tunnel?"

"Yes."

He laughed aloud. "I suppose you can see an army marching in from Africa!" he grinned. "Well, I don't think I should worry—the tunnel doesn't exist!"

I ran through the stock arguments about the disappearance of the apes, but he laughed again.

"I don't know where monkeys go in winter time," he smiled. "Even if they did go to Africa, I shouldn't worry. An army isn't a monkey, you know. But why this sudden anxiety about the safety of Gibraltar? I suppose you've been bitten by the Fascist bug?"

"What—you know about their plot?"

"We do hear things occasionally," he hedged. "As you know," he added, quietly.

I did. I think I know as much of the ramifications of Intelligence work as most men. But, when I pressed him, I found that he had heard no more than that there *was* a plot, and obviously didn't believe that it would ever mature.

His confidence affected me, however, and I felt that unless Vicente's 'diversion' were a powerful one, then

the plot would prove a fiasco. Yet I did not forget my first purpose—to prevent even the attempt.

I went along to the Garrison Library, and the erudite librarian surrounded me with books on Gibraltar and its history. Several mentioned the tunnel legend, quoting the familiar arguments. Not until the end of a somewhat weary day did I come across a paragraph which aroused my drooping interest.

The book was Ronti's *Historia de Gibraltar*, published nearly a hundred years ago. He described at great length the siege of 1779-83, and the construction of the famous galleries—how General Elliott, concerned at the cross-fire of Spanish batteries, exclaimed in public: “I would give a thousand dollars to anyone who would tell me how to bring a flanking fire on these works.” Sergeant Ince, of the Royal Engineers, had evidently given this problem previous thought, for he immediately stepped forward with a scheme for a honeycomb of galleries through the solid rock. His plan was adopted, and carried out by convict labour.

All this was accurate but ordinary, but a footnote was very interesting. “The galleries were constructed at a cost of but a single casualty,” Ronti wrote. “This was a convict named Flambeau, who disappeared during the forced labour on which he was engaged. It was assumed that he had fallen into some pit or crevice, and could not be found. Years later, however, a strange story found its way from the African coast. On the Apes' Hill, near Ceuta, Moorish travellers said, was an aged hermit who lived with the monkeys. He was completely mad,

had forgotten his tongue. When asked his name, he cried 'Flambo! Flambo!' and ran away. This was the only word he was ever heard to say. He appeared to live as the monkeys did, but accepted human food if it should be offered to him. He wore no clothes except rags which godly men gave him from their charity, but his body was not hairy, like an ape's! Unlike the apes, however, he lived always in the open, and was never seen to enter a cave. He died about 1805."

Curiously, Ronti makes no comment on the story. Nor does it seem that anyone was sufficiently interested to seek out this madman. This is a pity. However mad he might be, surely a sympathetic and acute interrogation of Flambeau—Flambo would have yielded interesting results. Of course, the story was no proof of the existence of the tunnel. The unfortunate Flambeau may have fallen through a chasm into the sea, have been picked up and carried over to Africa. But one phrase is surely significant. "Unlike the apes, however, he lived always in the open, and was never seen to enter a cave." This is unnatural and meaningless—unless the man had been driven mad by the horrors of claustrophobia.

The lack of interest in the Flambeau mystery may of course be explained by the period. Who should bother about a casual madman amid the excitements of the Napoleonic Wars?

This was the only reference I could discover which seemed to bear directly upon the mystery. Half a dozen other books, however, contained occasional sentences which intrigued my curiosity. For example, the official

Gibraltar directory—a highly sensible compendium of information and with no trace of fantasy—included the following paragraph:

“It is a very significant fact that the skeletons or skins of the dead monkeys can never be found, and this must be due to their companions burying them in some inaccessible place.”

Other books referred to officers who had lost their lives in the exploration of Gibraltar’s labyrinth of caves—many of the bodies were never found. One quoted a letter from one of the doomed men. ‘When I get back I shall be able to tell you the truth about the Apes’ Tunnel,’ he said; unfortunately, he never came back.

I went out among the people of Gibraltar and tried to get them to talk. The cafés in the main streets are almost exclusively frequented by British soldiers and sailors, but in the higher town I found little drinking houses which appeared to be the perquisite of the local inhabitants alone. Diplomatic purchases of a few drinks loosened tongues—particularly as the direction of my enquiries was harmless and casual gossip. I found that the opinion of my friend on the Governor’s staff was by no means universally accepted by the older inhabitants of Gibraltar. The legend of the tunnel had been one of their childhood memories and had never been given up. I must have heard the story of the disappearing apes a dozen times in the course of the evening, but although I found plenty of men who were absolutely convinced that there was some sort of a passage under the Straits of Gibraltar, none

of them had the slightest practical idea, nor could they put me in touch with anyone who had. I was rather dejected, therefore, when at last I took the 'bus and passed over the frontier to La Linea, there to meet Mitza.

In high contrast to my dejection after an apparently wasted day, however, I found Mitza in a state of great excitement.

"You must get me into Gibraltar at once, *rom*," she cried. "I have been talking to my people here, as you told me to do, and they have told me about a man who lives on the east side of the Rock—a strange man, they say, who knows strange things: you must get me into Gibraltar."

That was fairly easily arranged. Although Mitza had no papers, my personal guarantee was sufficient to gain for her a temporary admittance the following morning. Arranging a meeting place for later in the day, she went off to find this man of whom the gypsies of La Linea had spoken. Apparently there was a small gypsy *barrio* in the tiny village of La Caleta, on the east side of the Rock—a village inhabited, it is interesting to note, by peasants of Italian stock, whose forefathers settled there centuries ago.

I had a swim and then returned to the library again, to plod through more of the volumes which the librarian kindly placed at my disposal. Certainly there were enough of them—the library had a wonderful collection of books about the history of its own town; in this it differed considerably from others I could mention nearer home.

Half-way through the afternoon, however, I realised that I was only marking time—I was weary of wading through reams of paper, and was really waiting for the time when I could meet Mitza again. She kept our tryst punctually, and as soon as I saw her shining eyes I knew that she had news for me. It was well after dark, so we were able to walk about back streets without attracting undue attention.

“Oh, my *rom*, I believe that we are on the right track!” she began, unable to control her excitement. “I do not know about a tunnel, but there is something strange at Gibraltar, and I believe I have found the man—the only man—who can take us to see it. That is,” she concluded, “if he is a man.”

“Start from the beginning, Mitza,” I suggested. “Tell me first about this man.”

“Well,” she answered. “There is only a small gypsy tribe at La Caleta, but there they told me about one of their number who was not quite a man. He is strange, they said; he speaks our language, but is small and stunted; they say that he is only half a man and half a monkey. It is whispered among the tribe that his mother was a mad girl who used to wander alone on the Rock, and that one day she had a child—although she had no husband—and this child, they say, was born wrong, and has been a freak ever since. Even at birth he was covered with hair, and they said that his father must have been a monkey. Yet they could not punish the girl for her sin because she was mad, and when she was weaning the child she died.”

"Go on, Mitza," I encouraged her.

"She died from poisoning, they said, because she tried to suckle this child when—at less than a year old—it had a full set of teeth. And the child itself proved to be mad, although he learned their language. He will not live with the Romanies: instead, he in his turn wanders over the mountainside, and they say that he plays with the apes on the Rock—he is the only one that the apes allow to come near them. They are quite certain that he is only half a man and half an ape."

Of course they were wrong. It has been known for a long time that men and monkeys cannot breed together. The man was evidently some freak of nature, and the necessary legend had been invented to explain him.

"But did you see this man, Mitza?" I asked.

"No, *rom*, not yet. He was away on the Rock, and I could not find him. But every two or three days he comes back to my people and they give him food; and then, when he comes, I shall see him—and I want you to see him, too, to make certain that I say the right things to him. For if he is a strange half-man, like those we saw in the Valley of the Shadow, then I might get frightened and confused."

"Very well, Mitza," I promised, "of course I'll come. I wonder—maybe he will be able to lead us to strange places."

"But you will have to come as a gypsy," she said. "My people here would never welcome a *gorgio*—they would fling me out of the *barrio* if they knew that I was

married to a *paillo*. So you will become a gypsy again, *rom*, will you not?"

"Of course," I agreed. "Wait for me here while I become a gypsy again."

I went back to my hotel, paid my bill and left my suitcase in the landlord's charge. Then I asked for an ample supply of coffee to be sent to my room. As before, I washed in the coffee, then made a careful exit with my face shielded. Coffee is a remarkably effective disguise for temporary use: I ought to add the warning, maybe, that its stain does not come off quite so easily as it goes on!

Hand in hand with Mitza, both of us happy to be together again, we went along the road to La Caleta. The gypsy quarter consisted of no more than half a dozen stone hovels, but the code of hospitality was almost as strong as that of the open road: in any case, I made sure of my welcome by sticking a couple of bottles of wine in my pocket. I was introduced by Mitza as her *rom*, an English Romany who unfortunately had but a few words of *Caló*. As most of the gypsies spoke a weird mixture of Spanish and archaic Italian, I was able to maintain some sort of conversation with them.

Mitza and I were allocated a heap of straw and a blanket in one corner of a hovel—we shared the room with two married couples and a dozen children. The previous evening, I had slept in a civilised bed and in conditions of comfort; here I was acutely uncomfortable, yet the warmth of Mitza's affection made me forget the prickle of the straw, the attentions of the bugs and fleas,

and the cold of the stone floor striking through from beneath.

The whole of the next day we waited, squatting about in true gypsy fashion, gazing over the blue waters of Catalan Bay. In my turn I asked questions about this strange half-man we wanted to meet. Except that his nickname was, appropriately enough, *El Mono*—the monkey—I could scarcely add to what Mitza had gathered the previous day.

That evening, however, while we were sitting outside the cottage in the cool of the day, one of the men indicated with his thumb the hillside behind me. A few minutes later I saw signs of movement on a narrow track, and almost before I realised it, so rapid was his movement, *El Mono* was among us; it was all I could do to prevent myself from shouting aloud in my amazement. The first inhabitant of the Valley of the Shadow had almost made me sick, yet *El Mono* was, maybe, a greater shock. He was stunted—a hunchback not more than four feet high: his neck was so short that it scarcely existed, his chin almost touching his chest: his feet were extraordinarily long and flat: no normal shoes would ever have fitted him—but he needed nothing so civilised: his arms and fingers, too, were of abnormal length. He wore no more clothes than a labourer's smock, filthy and torn, but the exposed portion of his body—that is, at least three-quarters of it—was largely covered in hair. On the arms the hair was short, but on his body, particularly his stomach, grey hairs grew almost in the thickness of a fur to a length of two inches or more. As I looked at him, I agreed that at

least these ignorant gypsies were not merely imaginative in their explanation of his origin.

His walk, too, was strangely suggestive. Although he walked on his feet, his hunch-backed crouch was so pronounced that his long arms almost touched the floor; but his face was that of a man—except that his hair was short, and extended down the side of his cheek to form a short, scrubby beard under the chin.

It was all illusion, of course—he was definitely a man, not a monkey. Yet so queer a freak of nature I had never seen, and a dozen times I had to assure myself that the science of biology could not err—that it was impossible that he could have apes' blood in his veins. His mannerisms certainly aided the illusion—but if, as I was told, he spent more time with apes than with humans, they were reasonably explained.

For the moment I forgot all about the hundreds of questions I wanted to put to him—I was gazing at him with fascinated horror. Mitza made no disguise of her fright, and clung to me in alarm as this weird being slouched into our midst and squatted down. Yet he seemed to be perfectly harmless, for two or three of the children approached him with obvious pleasure. He grinned amiably at them and tickled them playfully; then one of the women brought him out a wooden plate laden with food. At that moment he seemed indeed to change from a man to a monkey: he ate with his fingers, chewing vigorously, his eyes rolling in obvious pleasure. He must have been with us for a good half-hour before he uttered a word.

In low tones I was talking to my neighbour—the owner of the little cottage which was giving me shelter. He advised me to be very patient, to await my opportunity, if I wished to talk to El Mono. At some times, he said, he was very dull and did not appear to understand a word addressed to him; at others he was bright and indeed almost normal. After he had fed he would almost certainly go to sleep, but when he awakened he would probably be ready to talk. He might wake, however, at any old hour—sometimes in the middle of the night, sometimes the middle of the day—probably it all depended on his previous activity on the Rock.

As I could scarcely afford to miss an opportunity, I had to keep awake. Sure enough, El Mono, immediately after his meal, stretched himself out to sleep. I noticed that, unlike the rest of the people in the cottage, he made no attempt to cover himself with blankets—of course he must have been used to every sort of exposure on the bleak east face of the hill. My night's vigil was unrewarded, however; in the morning I might have wakened him, but Mitza, who had been talking to the other women, cautioned me against it. When suddenly wakened, he was very quarrelsome, and generally ran off in anger.

So I sat by the side of this strange, sleeping creature until midday, when suddenly he awoke. Very abruptly—there was nothing of the stretching and yawning of a human awakening: one moment he was dead asleep, the next vivaciously awake. He looked at me in some surprise—apparently he had not noticed me the previous

evening. My complexion and clothes apparently met with his approval, for suddenly he began to talk—in a strange, high-pitched voice, like an over-aged youth whose voice has not yet broken.

For once Mitza failed me, for her terror was too apparent to let her serve as interpreter. El Mono apparently spoke nothing but *Caló*, but the man of the house translated it into rough Spanish. Never have I essayed anything so difficult, but of course it was essential to gain the confidence of El Mono, so I said kind things and talked about the Rock. He certainly seemed to be in one of his best moods, for apparently he understood what my neighbour was saying to him.

After a few minutes, however, he lost interest in me and went outside to play with the children. The time had come, I calculated, to put down some more of my cards on the table.

“Look here,” I said, turning to my host. “You’ve got to do something for me—and you won’t lose anything by it. I believe that there is a tunnel somewhere leading from Gibraltar.”

“So do I,” he said. “My grandfather often spoke about it.”

“And it may be that El Mono knows about this tunnel,” I went on.

“It may well be,” he agreed; “if anybody does know, then El Mono does.”

“Well, I want to know about this tunnel.”

“Why?” he asked.

“There are obvious uses for a tunnel which leads from Spanish Africa to British Gibraltar,” I said.

Like most gypsies he was quick-witted, and immediately saw my point.

"Ah, for smuggling!" he said.

"Yes," I agreed.

"Of course," he said; "why did I never think of that before? But then, I could never use it."

"No, you could never use it," I agreed, "because you are a true Romany and could never breathe if you were confined to the narrow walls of a tunnel. But my upbringing has been strange. In England I have lived in caves and within walls and under roofs, and I am determined to find out about this tunnel. Now, if you can arrange it for me there is a reward for you. If you will do this—and keep it secret at the same time—there are a hundred pesetas for you."

"A hundred pesetas?" he cried, his eyes glowing. A hundred pesetas—three pounds at that time—was a fortune to a man in his lowly position.

"Yes," I said. "Fifty pesetas now, and fifty pesetas afterwards."

Naturally, being a gypsy, he began to haggle, holding out for a bigger sum and for all of it to be paid at once. But I was firm, and at last he agreed.

"I think I had better talk to El Mono by myself," he said. "And, of course, it may take some time. He has always gone off by himself: whenever one of us has tried to approach him so as to see exactly what he does do on the Rock, he has always hidden himself so that we cannot find him."

"Is there nothing he wants?" I asked. "Could I

not promise him something if he would do it for me?"

"Only two things attract him," my host replied. "He steals all bright things he can find, and he has a passion for chocolate. An English doctor who came to see him, to write about him for a doctor's newspaper, gave him a bar of chocolate, and I never saw him so excited."

"You can promise him dozens of bars of chocolate," I answered. "And dozens of bright things. Look, while you talk to him I will walk into the town and buy a preliminary supply."

"No, don't go away," he said. "Send the girl instead."

So Mitza rushed off into the village to do the necessary shopping. My host, anxious beyond measure for his first advance of pesetas, waded into his task at once. I scarcely understood a word that passed between them. As the conversation continued, it seemed to me that El Mono grew more stupid, for from time to time he scratched his head, and my host had to repeat his question again and again. At a right moment, however, Mitza returned, carrying with her a couple of half-pound slabs of chocolate. The paper packages meant nothing to El Mono, so I stripped off the end of one of them and passed him a few sections. His eyes were like those of a child as they sparkled in their glee. The next instant, however, was decidedly not to plan, for he snatched the two packets from Mitza's frightened hands and with a high-pitched yell of triumph ran out of the house and disappeared up the mountainside.

At first my host had difficulty in controlling his anger, but then the gypsy's fatalism exerted its influence.

"Now you will have to be patient a little longer," he said grimly. "He will not return until that is all gone."

For two more days I lazed about in that gypsy quarter—unable even to have a refreshing swim, lest my coffee-coloured skin should become white again. I used the long time of waiting to some advantage—I wrote long letters to Marshall and Mason in England, telling them exactly what I had discovered, and about the adventure which lay before me. And, I need hardly say, I wrote at some length to Margaret.

But when at last El Mono returned, had been fed, and had slept, my host approached him more cautiously. The stranger, he explained to El Mono, knew all about the tunnel that started from the Rock; what was more, at the end of the tunnel he had hidden huge stocks of chocolate. Thus if El Mono would only guide the stranger along the tunnel, there would be great joy for him.

This had to be explained a dozen times in a dozen different ways before it penetrated the limited intelligence of the misfit squatting on the floor. At first it seemed that he was about to agree, but then a look of queer cunning crossed his face. He said nothing, but it seemed to me that I could read the intense argument in his mind—a cross between his greed and some instinctive loyalty to the apes who were, maybe, his playmates on the Rock. Soon I noticed that he was trembling.

"He is afraid," my host commented.

"Afraid of what?" I asked. "Afraid of the tunnel?"

"No, he is not afraid of the tunnel, he is afraid of the monkeys."

But the nature of that fear he was unable to discover, desperately as he needed my pesetas; he was cunning enough not to attempt to rush El Mono; having planted the idea in his childlike mind, he allowed sufficient time for it to develop, until in due course it should dominate the weird creature. This was evidently going to be a long business, for again El Mono tired of the subject and sped away to his caves on the Rock above us.

Once again I had to endure impatiently until the irresponsible fancy of El Mono should dictate his return. He came back sooner than I had expected, however—evidently the prospect of further supplies of his favourite delicacy had overwhelmed him. In the meantime, I had been talking seriously to Mitza; so far I had been able to carry on a roundabout conversation with El Mono through the medium of my host, but the time would come—very shortly, I hoped—when Mitza would have to take his place. It was essential, therefore, that she should conquer her very natural repulsive fear at the sight of this strange creature. Mitza, like a good gypsy wife, promised implicit obedience, and indeed when El Mono did again appear she greeted him in the same fashion as the rest of the little tribe. Nevertheless, in spite of my request, I kept a very careful eye upon him. I had noted that in playing with the children he favoured the little girls above the little boys. I was taking no chances of sexual mania being among his forms of madness.

On his return and after the essential preliminaries, therefore, Mitza took her part in the conversation, gallantly overcoming her terror. She had some difficulty in understanding him at first; he spoke *Caló*, a tongue which she could understand, but his voice production was so strange that she had difficulty in following him. She was troubled, too, by his madness—she was not accustomed, as was our host, to his complete irresponsibility. Two or three questions he would answer perfectly sanely, then it would be obvious that he was paying no attention whatsoever—he would burst into a fit of meaningless and aimless chattering.

But gradually Mitza and our host began to get down to real business. They hung out before the limited imagination of El Mono a veritable hoard of chocolate and bright things; they pointed to me continuously as the one man who could make these blessings his. Time after time they went over the same ground, until at last his cupidity overcame his fear. In one of his articulate moments Mitza gained from him a promise that he would take us to the tunnel.

At least, so Mitza had gathered, this tunnel was no myth—the apes really did pass under the Straits of Gibraltar and come up on the other side, so El Mono had assured her—we should have to find out for ourselves whether any reliance whatsoever could be placed upon his eccentric word. He himself had never made the journey and never would, Mitza explained; there was an obstacle in the middle of the tunnel—water. El Mono did not like water. Even if he did guide us along the

tunnel, from that point onwards we would have to make our own way.

The bargain sounds simple enough as I have written it down, but I can give my readers no idea of the hours of verbal labour expended upon its making. They spread over three or four days, for again El Mono took fright or was smitten with some nostalgia, or in his madness for no reason at all, and escaped to the bleak cliffside above us. Nevertheless the bargain, as Mitza outlined it to me, was satisfactory enough. I wanted to prove the existence of the Gibraltar Tunnel; once in it, presumably, it would be possible to make the journey to the other side—the greatest difficulty was to discover its entrance. For that matter, once I had discovered its entrance it might not be necessary to make the actual journey—a blocking of the tunnel would surely be enough; the military authorities at Gibraltar could see to that if, at the worst, I had to reveal the plot to them.

During one of El Mono's irresponsible absences I made every preparation for the journey: round our waists Mitza and I carried supplies of string—hundreds of yards of it—eminently useful for exploration of underground passages: I proposed to use it only for tracing difficult passages—obviously we should need miles of it to line the whole length of the tunnel. I added a length of rope, thin but strong. I bought two good torches and ample reserves of batteries, and carried, as a reserve, candles and matches wrapped in a waterproof cover. The food question, too, was carefully considered—it is only nine miles from Gibraltar to the African coast, but

we could scarcely expect to walk that distance underground in a couple of hours! In the end I bought two rucksacks, so that Mitza and I could carry the necessary supplies—including, I should say, an ample stock of chocolate and brass-ware to reward El Mono for his services! And, I need hardly add, I carried with me a revolver and ammunition.

The arguments, the disappointments, the promises, the discussions with El Mono, would be wearisome if I detailed them in full. I will pass on at once to the late afternoon when the queer creature declared that he was ready. I had paid my host his first fifty pesetas, and had sworn him to secrecy against the gaining of the other. Although no more than four o'clock, it was almost the hour of twilight on the east face of the Rock, where the sun is never seen long after midday. There was no one about—due to the absence of the sun and the east wind, this side of the Rock is almost invariably deserted in the afternoon. El Mono led us first on a narrow track which zig-zagged up the sloping cliff face behind Catalan Bay. Then he left it to climb more directly—although, I noted, we joined the path again. Almost without warning he plunged through a small hole: we followed, and from the atmosphere and the reverberation of our voices I guessed that we were in one of those caverns which are a feature of the Rock. I flashed my torch about me, and its rays revealed a great cave which might almost have been a cathedral, for stalactite formations descended from the high roof to the floor, making beautiful patterns of natural dignity in their haphazard growth. But I ceased my investi-

gation abruptly, for El Mono was terrified at the weird, fantastic shapes and shadows which my torch revealed.

We followed, keeping close to our weird guide. Evidently by long use his eyes were like those of a cat, for times without number Mitza had to call after him to go more slowly. Eventually we found that we ourselves moved with greater confidence. It is possible to develop some sort of instinct in the dark—any man who fought in night battles during the War will confirm this. In spite of El Mono's fear, nevertheless, I was determined to find out exactly where we were going. So that he could not run away in his terror, however, I followed him, turning backwards occasionally to play my torch about the region over which we had passed, and making chalk marks at appropriate points.

From the great cave which we had entered we passed through a long series of smaller caves, some of them entered by a hole only four or five feet high. It was, of course, impossible to think of using my precious string at this stage, but I used my chalk vigorously, so that in more normal circumstances I might be able to follow the same route. At last we came to another cave, not so large as the first, but considerably larger than the caverns through which we had been passing. A hasty flash round its walls revealed no sign of any exit.

But El Mono, keeping close to the side of the cave, suddenly *began to climb*. At last, I thought, I had discovered the reason why so many investigators of the tunnel theory had failed. In the first place, they would probably have begun their investigations from the caves

nearer to sea level—the one we had entered must have been a thousand feet above it. Further, even if they had come into this particular cave, rather naturally they would have searched for the entrance to the tunnel in the floor of the cave. It soon became apparent that we were to discover it in the roof.

In the darkness El Mono climbed the almost vertical cliff of the cave wall. Mitza was following him, better to maintain a conversation, but she called out to him that she was unable to climb by the way he had gone. Despite his distress, it was essential to play my torch upon the cliff; then, letting Mitza light my way, I went in front of her, climbing with great difficulty for thirty or forty feet. There I found myself on a rough ledge which gave a reasonable purchase, and lowered to Mitza a length of silken rope—light and thin but very strong. With this to guide and support her, Mitza's bare feet pressed against the cliff walls and in a few minutes she was standing by my side.

El Mono had made no move to assist me—probably he despised us for our weakness in making such a fuss about climbing a mere cliff face of thirty feet. While I was helping Mitza up, he squatted on the little shelf, a far-away look in his expressionless eyes. So irresponsible was he that, even when Mitza announced that we were ready to continue, he still squatted there. We imagined that he was pondering whether to take us any further; actually, I don't believe he was thinking at all—I had noticed that occasionally his mind was obviously a complete blank.

At last he flung himself down on all fours and began to crawl into what appeared to be no more than a crevice in the rock. Marking the spot suitably with chalk, I prepared to follow—with some trepidation, for my shoulders were twice the width of his, and I had no desire to repeat my uncomfortable experience in the Salamanca chimney. A few yards of wriggling along a narrow path, enclosed between tall cliffs, however, brought us to yet another cave. Here, so it seemed, the darkness was not so intense; my eyes now accustomed to the gloom, it seemed that I could even pick out the shape of the great dome of rock above us—I got the impression of a cupola of great height.

"What is that, *rom?*" Mitza cried, clutching my arm. "Look, up there—and up there."

I gazed in the directions to which she pointed.

"It must be a ghost! A ghost!" she whispered, and clung closely to me.

I was stern with her—the most effective way to compose her, as I had already found. Justly, too, for the patches to which she pointed were no ghosts, but tiny specks of diffused light. So far as I could judge, from the roof of the cave in which we stood natural chimneys or cliffs made their way direct to the surface of the Rock—probably somewhere near its highest point.

As we walked across the floor of the cave, following our impatient guide, suddenly we found ourselves in water. Surely this was not the obstacle of which El Mono had warned us; evidently not, for he shuffled along without signs of concern. The water was only ankle deep, but I

noticed that it was flowing—flowing towards the west face of the Rock. I paid little attention to this fact at the moment, but it was destined to appear significant later on.

At the other end of the cave was another natural fissure, descending now rapidly. It was evidently a natural fault in the rock, a legacy from those primeval days when this great, massive promontory had first been thrown out of the water—or maybe the space once occupied by a vein of calcite, long since crumbled away. From time to time, too, it seemed that the darkness was not so intense and that the air was fresher—there was even a slight following breeze. I could see no further signs of crevices breaking to the sky, but evidently fresh air must by some method be reaching the tunnel.

We were now clear of water, and as I stumbled along I kicked something on the rocky floor. Shining my torch on the ground, I picked it up, then cried aloud in my amazement; for the object I had kicked was a familiar one—a *soldier's pay book*!

It seemed incredible! I could have sworn that we were the first human beings ever to attempt this passage. I had not been able to discover that anyone in the history of Gibraltar had penetrated so far as we had; there had been no sign whatsoever that any man in history had passed this way—and yet at my feet was a soldier's pay book!

I picked it up and looked at it, and my surprise deepened—for the last entry in this *pay book* was made only five weeks previously!

A rapid succession of ridiculous ideas flooded my brain. Vicente had claimed that his diversion was ready for action. Was it possible that he had a British soldier in his pay, and that this man was working on some nefarious scheme in the heart of the Rock itself? It sounded absurd to suspect the fidelity of a British soldier—yet, after all, I in my time had served as a German soldier, and all the while was a British spy. For the moment at least I could think of no other explanation, yet I did ask Mitza to put the question to *El Mono*.

He was again squatting down waiting for us. I showed him the pay book and he turned it over inquisitively; then he bit it, but when he found that it was inedible he threw it away in disgust. Mitza questioned him gently; she put her queries in a dozen different ways before he could or would understand. But at last she turned to me in surprise.

“*Rom*, what does this mean?” she asked. “He says that often he has found things along this stretch of the tunnel—he says that they fall through from the military galleries above.”

And, when I thought of it, the explanation was by no means impossible. The military galleries were, of course, hacked out during the siege from the living rock, and for the greater part at least their floor is the living rock to-day. Naturally, it has many irregularities and fissures, and it was by no means impossible that more than one of these led down to the tunnel where we now stood—maybe some cleft or fault of a width of a few inches, but quite sufficient for a clumsy or unlucky

soldier occasionally to lose some small personal possession. El Mono declared that there were other military galleries *below* the tunnel we were following—and that, I knew, was not impossible.

At least the connection between the tunnel and the galleries would be easy to verify, and I recovered the pocket-book and put it in my pocket—marking the spot again with my invaluable chalk. Now the path El Mono indicated descended very rapidly. He had by this time got accustomed to my torch, which I played about me continuously. It was almost eerie in that dreadful silence to observe the natural features of the rock masses about me. It was evident that we were making our way down a great cleft in the rock, either a natural fault or a vein of soluble salt long ago eroded by water. Sometimes the cleft was wide and so high that my torch could not find the roof: at others it was almost filled with great irregular rocks, so that we had to crawl on hands and knees, twisting and turning to follow our guide.

We must have been underground for best part of an hour, and the intense cold was affecting us. Mitza, a child of the open air, felt it less severely than I did, though she was not so warmly clad. Fortunately, however, the intense excitement and strain had made me forget such mundane discomforts. Even if I discovered nothing else, I had already found out sufficient to earn the gratitude of the military defenders of Gibraltar.

Suddenly El Mono stopped, and by the light of my torch I saw a look of concern on his face. For the first time since we entered the tunnel he began that

half-human chattering in his strange, high-pitched voice.

"He is afraid," Mitza translated.

"Why afraid?" I asked.

"It is at this point that we go under the sea," she said.

"Well, what about it?"

"He is afraid of the sea."

"But the sea is not in the tunnel," I suggested.

"No, but he is always afraid that the sea should burst into the tunnel," she explained. "He has only been further than this point once or twice before—he says that the apes have forbidden him to go further."

"That's rubbish, of course, Mitza," I said. "He may think in his madness that he talks to the apes, but he doesn't really: he just imagines that they've forbidden him to go any further because he is afraid—that's the real reason. Try and comfort him; tell him that these torches which we carry are really fire, and fire is the enemy of water—the sea dare not come to us while we carry fire in our hands."

It was not a very logical argument, but the best I could think of on the spur of the moment. At least it was sufficient to appeal to his primitive intellect, and after another fit of hesitation he passed on.

Always we descended; sometimes it was as if we were in a great dark valley of which we could scarcely see the sides; sometimes the valley was confined and we had to walk sideways between its narrow walls. For occasional stretches we had to crawl, and more than once we passed through holes not two feet high.

By this time we must have been a mile or so under the Straits of Gibraltar. I was very surprised that the air was so good; occasionally I could still feel a gentle pressure of wind, evidently the clefts and fissures of the Rock of Gibraltar were still feeding us with the precious air, and the very fact that there was a slight breeze raised hope and expectation—surely the air must have some outlet, otherwise its movement would be inexplicable.

For another hour our journey was almost monotonous, except for the physical labour of crawling along narrow alleys or occasionally climbing over a cairn of rocks. The only relief from its monotony, in fact, came from El Mono, who by this time was obviously terrified. I was convinced that he would have turned back on the slightest provocation—and that he would not have considered us for a second in making his exit. I watched him very carefully, therefore, whenever there was room in the tunnel for him to pass us, and whispered to Mitza to do the same. Occasionally he squatted down and for minutes refused to move further. Nevertheless, I was not ill-pleased with his performance—his period of comparative lucidity had lasted remarkably well.

Mitza had apparently overcome her first alarm. She was a real Romany—in La Caleta I had discovered that even a night under a roof was almost torture to her, who had scarcely known such substantial fabric above her head. It is easy to imagine therefore, her fear when she suddenly found herself encased within masses of rock. It says something of her affection for me and her implicit

trust in me that she made no scene, but conquered her fear and plodded sedately on.

Our little adventure rather naturally cast my mind back to the books of Jules Verne, and it was just when I was comparing the excitement of his fantastic stories with the monotony of our own journey—after his very heart—when drama suddenly developed. We were once again in a narrow cleft, so that I at least had to turn sideways to get along at all. Suddenly El Mono stopped dead and began to whimper.

“What’s the matter with him, Mitza?” I asked.

“He is afraid,” she said.

“Comfort him again—he seems to be afraid every ten minutes or so.”

“He swears that the apes will be angry with him.”

“Tell him that we have a talisman that will pacify the apes.”

“He says the apes are coming!”

This was a different proposition. If it were true, as the gypsies of La Caleta had said, that El Mono did spend part of his time in company with the apes, it might also be true that he would be aware of their coming. Yet, if he were really their playmate, why should he be afraid of them? For naturally I refused to accept his story that they had forbidden him to come as far!

“Give him a piece of chocolate and tell him to go on,” I suggested, offering the usual panacea to El Mono’s troubled nerves.

But for once this failed to pacify him; he turned, and tried to force his way back. This was impossible, for

Mitza and I blocked the path. The alley was so narrow that he could not press by us—his own body, in fact, stretched almost from side to side. At this stage I was walking in front of Mitza, and I pushed El Mono before me, facing him the right way. With a primitive, firm control is often as effective as persuasion.

“We’ll take it steady,” I said. “He’s just got a fit of nerves—he’ll go on all right.”

Sure enough, he moved forward a few hesitant steps. I followed close behind, pressing him onwards. The path turned suddenly to the left at an angle of a hundred degrees or more. El Mono disappeared from view as he turned the corner—the path was so narrow that I was several yards behind him. Then, suddenly, I heard a scream—an inhuman wail of terror which echoed in frightening fashion about the narrow confines of the tunnel.

CHAPTER XII

Lovecharakti

I STUMBLED IN my haste to round the narrow and awkward corner; then I recoiled in alarm, so that Mitza, following close at my heels, shrieked in terror. For, as my torch illuminated the narrow tunnel in fantastic fashion, it revealed our guide in the grip of a giant ape.

When I look back on the tragedy dispassionately, I am of the opinion that had El Mono kept his head he could have defended himself. An ape may have claws, but a man—even a feeble-minded man—has wits. It seems to me, however, that El Mono was so overcome by his terror that he gave up all idea of resistance—maybe it was true that at the back of his mind he had some feeling of guilt that he had invaded the ape territory, bringing strangers with him. At any rate, when my lamp flashed upon him he was standing helplessly, simply squealing in fear as the furious ape facing him clawed viciously at his face and chest. His screams were appalling—they would have been unnerving at any time, but in that strange, confined, unnatural space their high-pitched echoes were unnerving, and I could readily forgive Mitza her fright, so that she herself added her screams to his.

My trouble was that, as El Mono was bigger than the attacking ape, a good half minute must have passed

before I was able to bring my revolver into play—for twenty consecutive seconds I was dodging about in the restricted space trying to gain a point of vantage that would enable me to get at El Mono's attacker. The moment I did, of course, it was all over—but I was unable to fire a shot until El Mono himself was sinking helplessly to the ground. A second later the ape fell beside him dead.

I could not recall ever having been confronted with a parallel situation. El Mono was terribly wounded—I had no idea that an ape's claws were so long. His face was literally torn to ribbons, and blood spurted from his chest. Yet so narrow was the passage that I could give him no help—I could scarcely bend down to touch him. Normally I am fairly useful in an emergency, but I must confess that in this case I stood for many seconds completely nonplussed—and maybe unnerved by the continued wails of El Mono, dwindling to more agitating moans of pain.

Obviously at all costs I must get him into some position where there was room to attend to him. For a hundred yards behind us the path was narrow. I strode over his body, therefore, treading on the corpse of the fallen ape, and pushed on ahead. Within twenty yards or so the gully broadened—not into a cave, but to a width of four or five feet. First I had to drag the ape's body out of the way and then, with Mitza's help and with much straining and grazing of the cliff walls, carried El Mono to the less restricted space.

Having got him there I did not know what to do with

Leave him!

him: he was far beyond any first aid that I could give him. I ripped off his tattered smock and saw how the ape's claws had torn into his skin and stomach. I recoiled in horror as I mopped away the blood from his face and saw the wicked crimson stripes which almost covered it. Both eyes had lain in the path of those furious claws—I would have needed the resources of a hospital to give him one-tenth of the attention he required.

While I was making my cursory, inefficient and useless examination, he continued to moan—a queer, inhuman cry, so high was its pitch. I will admit that I was getting somewhat rattled, and I could understand Mitza's feelings as she suddenly dropped the torch she was holding for me, and burst into tears. *Canul.*

“Kill him, kill him!” she cried.

And, of course, she was right—it was the only humane thing to do. Impossible to save his life or ease his pain with the trifling first aid kit I carried; even more impossible to attempt to get him back to civilisation. Even if I succeeded in doing so, he could not have lived—I was sure of that.

“Kill him, kill him!” cried Mitza again, as his cries re-echoed in a sudden crescendo. “Kill him! I cannot stand it!”

Yet there is some inherited feeling within a man that forbids him to kill. Sudden death is no stranger to me; I did my share during the War, and at that time and since then it has been my unhappy lot to have to kill more than one man in cold blood—personally, I mean, not the casual and impersonal killing of a man behind

a machine gun. But every time I had raised my hand against another there had been a reason for it; either he had intended to kill me or he was standing in the way of my mission—a mission which I had judged was far more important than a single life. I had killed half a dozen men, and no torturing conscience ever reminded me; and yet I hesitated now to put El Mono out of his misery. Had he been a real monkey or even a favourite dog I would not have hesitated a second.

“Kill him, kill him!” Mitza screamed, and I saw that she would soon be out of control. Still I did not move, arguing with myself as to the ethics of the deed. Then suddenly El Mono’s screams ceased; a queer gurgle from his throat, and all was silent. I pulled my other torch from my pocket and saw Mitza kneeling beside him, pulling her dagger from his heart. She stared uncomprehendingly at the body by her knees—a frightful sight, a mass of open wounds. Then she got up and staggered towards me. I supported her and laid her down on the rock floor, but she clung to me, sobbing out her heart. Not for a long while was she comforted. Afterwards I contrasted her reactions: here she had been braver than I; she had put a doomed creature out of his misery and yet her mind was racked by her deed. I compared her emotion with the calm way in which she had despatched her forced lover in the barn near Salamanca.

I gave her a stimulating drink at the right moment and then, as she sat recovering control, I considered the position. I had not the faintest idea where we were.

We had covered about two or three miles, I estimated, since we had first entered the cave on the Rock, but of course we must have moved in zig-zag fashion. I felt, however, that I could find my way back—so far as I had been able to observe, the tunnel was a solitary geological freak, and I had not noticed any sidetracks which might confuse us. Nevertheless, it would be very galling to have got so near the solution of the mystery and then to have given it up. I decided, therefore, that we would follow the tunnel so long as it appeared to be safe and the way was plainly marked. If we got really nervous, then we would make our way back again. Mitza was too dazed to argue and, when I had given her a reasonable rest, plodded stolidly behind me.

After another hundred yards of narrow gully and a short crawl through a three-foot tunnel, the crevice widened again and the going was easier. Suddenly veering round almost double on its course, its character changed again—it was remarkable how soon one becomes acclimatised to such situations, and how some instinct appears to tell you whether the roof is near or high. As we rounded the corner, I knew without flashing my lamp that the tunnel had temporarily become a cave again.

But suddenly Mitza caught at my ragged jacket.

“Stop!” she whispered. “I can hear something.”

I halted abruptly; our ears were by this time attuned to the incredible silence of this vast, underground vault. Yet for two or three minutes we stood and I heard nothing; but then, sure enough, sounds, certain and

distinct were carried to my ears—the clink of stones upon stones.

So this was the moment. I turned to Mitza and gave her final instructions.

"Mitza, in a place like this one man is as good as twenty," I explained. "We have only one revolver, and if there is any fighting to be done I must do it alone. You will stay here; if I win, as I shall, I shall call to you; but if I do not call then you must escape."

"No, *rom*," she whispered in return. "I shall come to you."

"You will *not* come, Mitza," I ordered. "If I am killed, it is your duty to avenge me. You understand?"

As a gypsy she saw that point well enough—vengeance is an integral part of the Romany code.

"If I am killed," I said, "you will get away immediately by the way we have come. You will go and see this man," and I gave her the card of my friend on the Governor's staff. "Then you can leave your vengeance to him. That is understood?"

After a little persuasion she agreed, for my confidence was not assumed when I assured her that actually it would be quite unnecessary. Then, advancing gently in my *alpargatas*, revolver in right hand and darkened torch in the other, I crept forward a few inches at a time. The road was so rough, however, that at last I had to switch on my torch—although of course I pointed it down direct to the ground about my feet.

The cave seemed to merge in another and larger cave, and as I gained the tunnel which formed its entrance I

heard a shuffling noise and a high pitched chatter. The time had come to throw caution to the wind—at least I must know what was happening. I held the torch at arm's length, so that if anyone fired at it he would miss me. I switched it on to its most powerful beam, and swept the ground before me. It lighted up an astonishing scene—half a dozen apes in a group close by the wall of the cave.

As my sudden light flashed upon them, there were sounds of clinking stones and a strange, excited chatter of amazement. They did not wait for further enquiry, however—in any case I did not fear them, since I was armed—but rushed away, chattering and shrieking. I followed them as quickly as I could, and saw that they were climbing in line the wall of the cliff. I had difficulty in following their course with the torch, but was able to make out they were moving away from me some twenty or thirty feet above the floor of the cave. One of them, however, in his excitement or fear could not retain his hold upon the narrow, craggy path that they were following. I heard him scream as he fell, hurtling through the air; but then, instead of the thud I expected, there came to my ears the sound of a mighty splash.

I hurried forward, and found myself on the shore of what appeared to be a lake of some size. Twenty yards away was the fallen ape, swimming for sheer life—the monkey family is not fond of the water, but, like most other animals, will and can swim at a moment of emergency. Soon he disappeared from the range of my torch, and, as the chattering of his fellows receded, I guessed

that the lake was at least some hundreds of yards across.

Before investigation I called to Mitza, who hurried forward gratefully. First we went to the cliff walls, where the apes had been standing when I first surprised them. We found there the body of a dead ape, half covered with stones and pieces of rock. So at least one portion of the legend was substantiated: the mystery mentioned in the Gibraltar directory—that no dead monkey or its skeleton was ever discovered—at least was now explained.

Again I left Mitza behind as I stripped to explore the lake. The water was bitterly cold, but by this time I was almost acclimatised to a low temperature. I swam with a small torch in my hand and flashed it from time to time to mark my progress. I was surprised to notice that the water was fresh, and I must have gone for two hundred yards or more when, flashing my torch in front of me, I had another moment of alarm, for strange shapes were floating on the water!

All kinds of ridiculous ideas flashed through my brain—crocodiles, Loch Ness monsters or their cousins, and absurdities of this kind. I had come so far, however, that I was at their mercy if they wanted me. Veering only away from their direction, therefore, I swam on, and in another twenty or thirty yards found my knees striking the hard rock. I crawled cautiously out of the water and prepared to investigate—cursing myself for not carrying a revolver as well as a torch.

But when I reached those strange shapes, they dispelled my alarm but not my surprise; they were no

fabulous long-lost primeval creatures, *but half a dozen folding canvas canoes of the familiar German pattern*. I sat down for a moment to think it out, and the rapid beating of my heart reflected the excitement within me. For at last I knew that I was right. Hitherto my journey had been exciting and even sensational, but it had proved nothing except that there was a tunnel leading away from Gibraltar. There was no guarantee whatsoever that it led to the other side of the Straits. There had been no sign of any kind of human passage: but these canoes entirely altered the situation—men, not monkeys, make folding canoes. And who should want to bring canoes to this lake under the Straits of Gibraltar? There were only two or three possible answers to such a query, and all of them were disturbing.

I got into one of the canoes and paddled across to Mitza. Despite my reassuring call, she was trembling with apprehension as my fragile craft glided silently almost to her feet; and I could well understand her fright—the whole journey must have been a perfect torture to a gypsy, to whom even walls and a roof are a tyranny.

I dressed again, and we paddled back over the lake. There I left Mitza again—from this point onwards, now that we had certain proofs of human activity, I would move forward a hundred yards at a time and would call to her to follow. If there should be trouble then my previous instruction held good.

In such fashion we must have covered another quarter of a mile—the cleft between the rocks was sheer but wider

than before and the going was comparatively easy. Suddenly it began to descend again—how it could do so below the level of the underground lake was rather surprising, but I am unversed in the mysteries of geology, and my casual observation of the formation of the rock could scarcely explain the mystery. It was Mitza's quick ears again which warned me of things to come.

The scramble down was so steep that I decided to negotiate it together in case Mitza should need help. I suppose that really I ought to have sent her back now, so that whatever happened the secret would be revealed to the authorities at Gibraltar. Yet although the hero of a story book would never admit it, I will confess that the whole episode and the continuous imprisonment within narrow walls were beginning to affect my nerves, and I had no wish to be alone.

“Listen, again!” Mitza whispered, soon after we had begun the abrupt descent.

Sure enough, as I concentrated every nerve and strove even to subdue the beating of my heart, I heard sounds—indeterminate but certain.

“It's probably those monkeys again, Mitza,” I said.

“No,” she whispered. “I am certain I heard human voices.” *And, as I listened further, so was I!*

Surely the real moment had now come for action; I had thought that before, but this time I was not deceived.

There was no question of hurry, so I sat down and wrote a short note to my friend in Gibraltar, giving him the essence of the story—the presence of the collapsible

canoes had, of course, provided the essential clue which I required. I made Mitza swear that she would not come to me unless I called—that if I died she would go at once by the route whence we had come, and would never rest until her vengeance was secure.

Then, revolver and torch again in hand, I recommenced the precarious descent. Despite my care, I could not help but dislodge an occasional stone, and one or two of them rolled on ahead of me. But suddenly I halted. Through a narrow crevice to my left—not the one I was following, and far too narrow to admit a human body—I saw a flash of yellow light.

I moved on with redoubled caution. If it should come to a fight, then I was well placed—and certainly I would have the overwhelming advantage of surprise. The configuration of the tunnel actually gave me a bigger advantage than I had ever anticipated, for a few minutes after I had seen the light I heard human voices—distant but distinct; and they were talking in Spanish.

Another dozen yards revealed every word of the conversation to me. The voices of three men took part in the conversation.

“What on earth’s the matter with you?” exclaimed the first one. “Why don’t you sit down? You’re doing nothing but fidget.”

“Yes, you’ll give me an attack of the jim-jams before you’ve finished,” said another.

“This place is enough to give anybody the jim-jams,” the third grumbled. “I don’t like it—I never did like it; and there’s something queer to-day. I don’t care what

you say. I could have sworn that I heard noises: and then those monkeys rushing through as they did—don't they usually sneak by on the other side of the cave, while to-day they rushed straight across it—almost across our knees? And if that chattering wasn't the monkeys' way of showing fear, then I'm mad. And this everlasting dripping water gets on your nerves. I'm certain, too, that I heard the sounds of falling stones."

"Of course you have," the first agreed. "We've all heard the sounds of falling stones—stones always are falling in this hell of a place at all hours of the day or night. The next time I go out of here I'm going to have a word with the chief—a week is far too long to be on duty here. Two or three days is enough. I'm going to insist on more frequent reliefs."

"But the chief won't see us, José—he won't be there. How can you ask him?"

"Well somebody else will have to say—I'm not going on like this; it's enough to wreck a man's nerve."

"I should think it is! By the time the moment arrives we shall be good for nothing; we shall be seeing things everywhere."

"I wouldn't mind the jim-jam part of it if it wasn't so bloody cold," said the second voice. "It's all very well for you fellows from the north, but I'm an Andalusian, and we thrive on sun."

"How much longer are we likely to be stuck here?"

"Goodness knows; and even when we get the word 'go' it's sure to take some time. It isn't just a matter of numbers of men—even if they got a couple of hundred men here,

not more than three or four can work at a time. And I've been exploring the tunnel ahead of us—you may take my word it isn't nearly so easy as that from the African side. It's going to be no joke getting stuff across in those baby canoes, and even when we've got it across the real work begins then. You know it seems to me that the chief hasn't allowed enough time for that part of the business."

"Oh, he's got his head screwed on all right."

"Of course he has, he's a damned good man! But I do wonder sometimes if he doesn't allow his enthusiasm to run away with him. It's a marvellous piece of planning, this is, and it's marvellous to have got as far as we have. But I wonder sometimes if, having surmounted a hundred difficulties, he doesn't under-rate the hundred and first."

"But surely we've got over the worst part—to get all this stuff here without suspicion."

"Yes, yes, I know that; but I tell you that it's going to be damned hard to move it on the two or three miles till we get it in place. Of course, even the modified scheme would be useful, but I know the chief's set his heart on the grand slam."

"I only wish I knew when it was likely to come off," the third voice complained again. "It's not good for the nerves to hang about day after day and never know when something's going to happen."

"Well, we can't rush things," said the first. "After all, everything depends on political considerations. Yes, it's no good doing the right thing at the wrong moment; we've got to leave that to the chief—then we can do it with confidence."

By this time, all my state of nerves had resolved itself. I was now confronted with a perfectly practical situation, and was confident of my ability to deal with it. Something had been brought to this point and, as one of the guards had prophesied, it was going to be difficult to get it to Gibraltar. Nevertheless, apparently, it *could* be got there. It is always a relief, when you have been chasing a mystery which you half suspect is all the while a myth, to find that it is a real mystery—and to solve it. Now I had enough evidence to prove to any doubting military man that the Fascist plot on Gibraltar was real and substantial.

Nor had I any hesitation in my immediate action. The reader will recall that an hour earlier I had been disturbed in my mind and had refused to shoot the miserable El Mono as he lay dying. I was now confronted with a plain duty. I could not leave the plot where it was, or these men where they were. I had to remove them, and to do it I was quite prepared to shoot them in cold blood. I had every advantage; they knew nothing of my coming, and I was in the darkness while they were in the light.

Nevertheless I was glad that circumstances led them to fire the first shot. Creeping cautiously forward in pitch darkness—for although I could hear them I could not yet see them—my feet again dislodged a number of small stones, which trickled down with merry crinkling on to a floor beneath.

“Listen!” I heard the third man call, alarm in his voice. “Listen, stones again—dozens of them falling.”

"Well, what of it?"

"I don't believe it's natural—there are too many stones falling to-day. And those monkeys, too!"

His voice was rising to a high pitch—that of a man who had been tried too long and who was almost unnerved.

I moved on more rapidly—it was essential to surprise them. Again I heard stones rattling down the steep slope.

"I believe there's someone there!" I heard him cry in wild excitement. "Halt, there!" he shouted. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

He did fire, too, and in the restricted space his revolver made a sound like a 9.2 howitzer; and at the moment he fired I saw him—my path was now approaching the cave in which they waited, and he stood at its mouth perfectly silhouetted.

His bullet was wasted, for he fired blindly, not knowing at what he aimed; mine was an easy shot, however, and he fell to the ground dead.

I heard pattering footsteps—as I anticipated, one of his fellows had rushed up to see what was the matter. Probably he did not even know that I had fired—for my revolver had spoken before the reverberating echoes of his companion's shot had ceased. If he had even been trained in tactical exercises, he forgot his lessons now as he bent down over his fallen comrade. A moment later he was stretched beside him.

The third man was more cunning, however. Probably he had approached the two bodies but, guessing that the shots must have come from the tunnel, refused to expose himself. This was awkward; if only he kept his head, the

advantage was with him, for if I wanted to follow up my success I would have to emerge into the light of the cave.

I waited for a few anxious minutes. I could sense him waiting too—his nerves aflame, wondering whence this sudden death had come. Of course, maybe he had taken fright and had run away; but at this juncture, so near to the culmination of my quest, I was in no mood to risk anything. One advantage of jagged rocks, however, is the cover they offer. This, coupled with the intense darkness, made my advance easier, so that I was able to reach a spot within a couple of yards of the two dead men. My first thought now was to reveal my adversary's presence—to ensure that he was still in the cave. This was easy—an ancient stratagem sufficed. I picked up a round boulder about the size of a man's head and pushed it forward gradually from the mouth of the tunnel, an inch or so at a time. I guessed that my opponent's eyes would not miss this cautious approach—his gaze would be concentrated on the few square yards which comprised the tunnel mouth.

He did observe, and he was a good shot, too, for his second bullet actually struck the piece of rock which I was holding. I was trying to read the psychology of the man—surprised, he would almost inevitably be rattled. As I thought, once his enemy was apparently revealed, he literally emptied his automatic upon the target presented to him. I counted the shots—ten staccato noises which eventually became a confused roar of rumbling—the German Mauser automatic, carrying ten rounds, is the

popular type in Spain. This was the moment when I could take a legitimate risk, for since attack was the last thing he could have expected in his underground vigil, it was reasonable to assume that he would only be carrying one automatic pistol. He must now halt to reload—an operation which occupies half a minute of time even to a man, calm and collected.

And that half minute was far too long. I crawled forward as the last bullet smote the rock behind me. The cave was but dimly lighted, but a little cloud of smoke from his pistol discovered him for me. Then I in my turn fired—two shots only; the first one passed through his right shoulder, and the second ripped open his thigh as he fell.

I made my way to his side cautiously—because I had heard only three voices, that did not mean that no more than three men were in the cave. I found that he was lying unconscious—his wounds would scarcely have had such immediate effect, but he had evidently banged his head heavily on the hard rock as he crashed to the ground. I did what I could to stop the bleeding from his wounds, but that in his chest appeared to be serious, and in the absence of proper attention it was fairly obvious to me that his chances of recovery were simply nil. It was, of course, quite out of the question to attempt to carry him to either Gibraltar or Ceuta, or even to fetch skilled attention. I had no bandages, but did the best I could with his shirt, which I ripped off him. Then, finding blankets, I piled them upon him so as to give him some moderate warmth.

Very rapidly I walked about the cave, flashing my torch in all directions. Up by one of the cliff walls was a pile of stores, and when I saw their extent and character I whistled aloud in my excitement. Quickly I passed to the dead men, and searched their pockets. The wounded man appeared to be in charge of the little group, and in a separate pocket-book he carried a sheaf of papers, all of which appeared to refer to the affair in hand. I glanced over them but hastily, yet my eyes must have shone with excitement and eager interest as I sensed their purport. They had the effect, too, of redoubling my interest and determination to probe this matter to the bottom. It appeared to me that a careful perusal of all the spoils which had fallen into my hands would reveal almost everything the plot had to hide. Yet such was the intensity of the chase that I felt I must know more—much more!

Mitza joined me, and knelt by the wounded man, bathing his head with water—of which we found a supply in petrol tins—and endeavouring to pour spirits down his throat. Suddenly I called upon her to desist. Selecting the larger of the two dead men, I took off his jacket: it was fortunately of well-marked pattern—that mottled grey so favoured in provincial Spain—and of characteristic type. It did not fit me very well—a good couple of inches too short round the chest—but a man newly roused from unconsciousness is seldom critical. The dead man's hat was very useful, for its brim was wide. Why men should want to wear hats at all in the depth of a cavern like this, was beyond my comprehension, until I reflected that these

men were Spaniards, to whom a hat is second nature in their life under the pitiless sun.

My 'disguise' thus accomplished, I told Mitza to hide herself in the shadows of the cave, and I myself carried on with her administrations. In a few minutes I remarked the tell-tale flicker of the man's eyelids, and soon afterwards his eyes opened. The effort was almost too much for him, and they closed again, yet his consciousness remained.

"What happened, José?" he whispered—I had already ascertained from the dead man's papers that my new and temporary name was José.

"We were attacked," I replied.

"Who by?" he whispered.

"An enemy—never mind him—he is dead. But so is Francisco," I continued. "I am the only one unharmed. I must go to get help for you."

"There will be no help for me," he said faintly. "It could not possibly arrive in time."

"But what shall I do?" I queried. "Must I stay here or shall I go at once to report?"

He pondered on this for a few moments, his eyes still closed. When they opened they betrayed no suspicion—naturally, I had positioned myself so that I was casting a shadow over him, and he was in no state to query any dissimilarity in voice between mine and the dead man.

"I think you had better go," he said. "You could scarcely do much by yourself if attack came, and if one enemy has found our secret, others may. Yes, go to

Ceuta at once. Report there—but do not stay there; go on to the chief yourself, and tell him all that has happened."

"Where is the chief?" I asked—and held my breath for the fateful answer which might mean so much.

"Maybe he is still at Salamanca," he said. "But they will tell you at Algeciras—he may be there by now." I saw his teeth closing on his lips in pain.

"My chest hurts," he complained. "I suppose there is nothing more you can do."

"I don't think so," I said. "I tried to stop the bleeding—I'll try again if you like."

"No, if it is fate, it is fate; but don't go yet; wait with me here until—until I die."

I promised him that, at any rate, and a few minutes later he had slipped back into unconsciousness again.

Leaving Mitza by him, I now began a more systematic investigation of the contents of the cave. There must have been at least a hundred boxes, and some cylinders which had a shape grimly suggestive and reminiscent. As I sniffed the limited air of the cave, indeed, I needed no reference to the papers I had taken from the wounded man to tell me the contents of these strange cylinders. I had seen their like before—they contained poison gas!

There must have been forty or fifty of them—they were only about half the size of those we used during the war, which used to weigh about ninety pounds, and were a frightful job when it was necessary to transport them to the front line. Cylinders of that size would have been quite impracticable in surroundings like these—

indeed, I would not have cared to undertake the job of carrying these, weighing forty pounds or thereabouts apiece, along the couple of miles of rough tunnel that lay between the cave and Gibraltar. Indeed, I doubt if they could have been got through one or two sections of the tunnel without preliminary enlarging operations.

Everything I saw and everything I read confirmed my respect for that young engineer officer, Vicente, I had met at Salamanca. No wonder that he had claimed that his diversion might prove so overwhelming that it would result in the fall of Gibraltar at one blow! The detailed plan which I had found in the pocket-book of the wounded man betrayed the purpose for which the gas was intended. I have mentioned that in the earliest stages of our exploration of the tunnel—round about the spot where I had picked up the soldier's pocket-book—it was evident that there was more than one small cleft, or fissure, which gave direct into the defensive galleries of the Rock. From these plans it appeared that there were two or three branches from the tunnel proper, and at half a dozen points there was some sort of communication between the illicit subways, so to speak, and the official galleries. The plan proposed, therefore, to force gas through these clefts into the galleries themselves. The galleries are elaborately ventilated, and the artificial currents of air which are created would themselves suffice to carry the gas to most points of the defensive system.

On paper the plan looked remarkably complete and certain of success. I was somewhat sceptical, however

—I have seen plans of gas attacks on paper before. The experts who had prepared them had vowed that not a single German could remain alive in his trench after their gas waves had passed, yet when our battalions advanced to the attack, it did not seem that the vow had been fulfilled—there always seemed to be ample German riflemen and machine gunners who had survived the gas and were awaiting our coming in confidence and comparative security.

Apparently, however, this was Vicente's own opinion, for he did not depend entirely upon it to knock out the defences and defenders of the galleries at one blow. Most of the boxes piled up against the cliff walls appeared to contain explosives. I opened one to investigate, and found that it contained ammonal. Again I placed a mental mark of respect against Vicente's name, for not every military engineer knows that ammonal is the most satisfactory explosive for underground work—it is three and a half times as powerful as gun cotton, it is safe, easy to handle, cannot be detonated by a bullet, and the resultant gases after a considerable explosion are not nearly so troublesome as those of gun cotton or dynamite.

Eagerly, therefore, I turned again to the detailed plan to discover the purpose of this considerable quantity of explosive. There must have been half a ton of it in all, though it was parcelled up conveniently so that one man could carry his portion. Again I did not envy the men who had to transport this weight of explosive through the tunnel I had traversed; yet I had to admit that the feat

was by no means impossible. In any case, the evidence of my own eyes confirmed that the ammonal *had* been carried underground from Ceuta or its neighbourhood to this cave—and although my calculations were necessarily haphazard, since I had not the faintest idea where I was, the journey involved must have been at least three times as long as that in prospect.

Naturally I did not jump to the conclusion that the idea was to blow up the Rock of Gibraltar. Short of a quantity of ammonal which would keep a chemical factory working overtime for years, the feat is physically impossible. No, Vicente's idea was simpler but much more practical. Following the gas attack, he proposed to explode moderate charges of ammonal in the tunnels under the galleries at points where clefts, or fissures or other irregularities in the rock, connected the two. Tamping up carefully on either side, the force of the explosion would follow the line of least resistance—through the clefts into the defensive tunnel. In some cases, where there was no convenient fissure and where the position of a battery was known, he had arranged an explosion—sometimes large, sometimes small—under the battery, or as near to it as possible. This, like those forced into the tunnels themselves, would not demolish the battery—far from it—but they would dislocate the gun mountings and the delicate machinery which is now an essential part of every piece of ordnance. I noticed from Vicente's calculations that he estimated that even if the gas failed, his series of explosions would put two thirds of the guns of the higher defences of Gibraltar out of action for at

least twenty-four hours. A serious consideration of his plans in comparative calm, weeks after I first found them, led me to the opinion that his claim was by no means exaggerated.

Yet, although tremendously effective as a diversion, Vicente's scheme scarcely promised the complete capture of Gibraltar. Even if he did succeed in putting out of action the batteries in the galleries, this meant only that one-fifth of the garrison was a casualty—the greater part of the troops and the whole of the Naval forces were to be found in the lower town and the bay. So I continued my search, an instinct prompting me that a genius like Vicente, having accomplished so much, would never overlook such an elementary consideration. I found one case apart from the rest. It bore special markings which I did not understand, but I found a reference to them in the papers I carried. Now hitherto my reactions had been those of excitement, but at this point I started suddenly in horror as I discovered the last phase of Vicente's diversion. My eyes opened far beyond their normal wideness as they stared at a remarkably complete map of the reservoirs of Gibraltar!

It is fairly well known, I think, that for a good many years the water supply of Gibraltar was the most serious of the problems of its defence. Not until 1868, were the first wells sunk on the north front—up till that time Gibraltar had been dependent upon spasmodic supplies, mostly from the mainland. In the course of time, however, the over-taxing of these wells and their proximity to the sea, made the water become brackish, and for the

last thirty or forty years their water has been used only for cleansing and sanitary purposes.

In 1898, however, the problem was tackled seriously. Catchments for rain water were prepared, and reservoirs were built in the heart of the Rock itself to provide storage for enough water to meet years of low rainfall. Since this time the reservoirs have been continuously extended—the last one being constructed as recently as 1933. They represent a somewhat remarkable engineering and scientific feat. The rain water is filtered and aerated before and after storage, and the periodical analyses and bacteriological examinations which are made report its quality as very high. The reservoirs depend almost entirely upon the rain water collected in the catchments, but the supplies are augmented to an inconsiderable extent by two or three natural springs in the heart of the Rock itself—high above sea level, and free from the brackish state of those of the lower town.

This much I knew, for an official of the City Council had demonstrated the water system of Gibraltar to me some years before when I had visited the Rock as an ordinary tourist. But now my amazement may be imagined when I found that—according to Vicente's plan—the shallow stream through which we had splashed in the early stages of our exploration of the tunnel led directly into one of the principal reservoirs, *and that the substance in that case standing apart from the rest was strong poison*. Suddenly I felt afraid at the ruthlessness of it all. This was war with the gloves off. Vicente was prepared to poison and kill twenty thousand civilians in order to rid

Gibraltar of its martial defenders. Evidently here was a man who would stop at absolutely nothing. Once I had thought it pitiful that so promising a life should be ended (as I imagined it had) in such miserable fashion that night at Salamanca; but now, on hasty but reasoned consideration, it seemed to me that his early demise was just as well!

The appalling effects of his plan could not be doubted, but it seemed to me that it had political disadvantages. The idea of the Fascist group in capturing Gibraltar, was to rally Spain round the Fascist cause. But if the capture of Gibraltar could only be effected by poisoning several thousand Spaniards, then, so my reactions ran, Spain might not feel quite so warmly towards the gallant band which has seized the Rock from its present masters. Yet, I considered further, more monstrous crimes than this had been successfully hidden from the public gaze before now. Success is the real test in international affairs. If you win, the fact that your methods were illegal or immoral does not seem to matter. Frederick the Great would be happy to see how his philosophy has been copied by leaders of modern 'civilised' nations. "I take what I want," he used to say. "Then I can always get clever lawyers to prove that it is really mine."

All this investigation had taken time, and I suddenly realised that I was very hungry. For a while I sat with Mitza, and we ate sparingly of the rations which we carried in our rucksacks. Had I been in the mood, I would have been very interested in Mitza's psychology. This girl, usually so fearless, was now strangely subdued.

She talked in a whisper, as if fearful that the shadows held malevolent eavesdroppers.

Almost as we finished our meal, the unconscious man stirred, and I saw his eyes open again. Mitza was nearest to him and well placed in the light of one of the feeble lamps which illuminated the cave. I saw a look of complete incomprehension flicker over his expressive eyes; then it was immediately swallowed by the intolerable pain which must have racked his wounded body. Now his eyes rolled in agony; he moaned and cried aloud in pitiable fashion. Again I approached him, but there was nothing I could do.

Whether he knew that I was friend or enemy I do not know; and he was past caring, for his body writhed in its anguish. He must have been a stout fellow, otherwise he would never have undertaken the task on which I found him employed, but he could not repress moan after moan of sheer agony. Indeed, it seemed to me as if he were not wholly conscious, for although his eyes were open there seemed to be no understanding in them.

As his groans, punctuated by shrieks of pain, continued, Mitza crept to my side and slipped her arm through mine.

"I cannot stand it, *rom*," she said. "His cries are too weird in this strange place—make him stop!"

"How can I make him stop, Mitza?" I argued. "He is in great pain—and he does not understand."

"But what are you going to do with him?" she cried.

"I don't know," I confessed.

"We can't possibly get him back to Gibraltar," she said.

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"No," I agreed. "It's quite impossible."

"And can you cure him—can you heal his wounds?"

"No," I said, "that's just as impossible as the other."

"Then why should he suffer?" she said. "It is just like El Mono, but worse, for this is a real man. If we cannot save him, why don't you kill him out of his misery?"

And, indeed, her argument was again more than logical.

"Anyway, he is an enemy," she added, pertinently.

That also was true. If it were impossible to get him back to Gibraltar it was certainly incredible to think of allowing him to escape to the Moroccan side, even if that were practicable. It seemed, therefore, as if I were faced with two alternatives—when I left the cave I could leave him here to die in his agony, or I could put him out of his misery. When the problem was resolved to such simple dimensions, decision was easy.

Nevertheless, I trembled as I drew my revolver. Just as a few hours previously I had hesitated to despatch the miserable El Mono, so now again I halted, afraid. When people argue glibly about euthanasia, they do not give enough thought to the feelings of the people who are deliberately to put their fellow men to death, however beneficent their intent. But maybe doctors would face such a problem more complacently than you or I.

"Kill him, kill him!" Mitza cried again, as a fresh paroxysm of groans of agony reverberated round the rugged walls of the cave. "Shoot, shoot, I cannot stand it!" And I saw her pressing her fingers into her ears to

drown the cries of the dying man—and maybe the report of my revolver.

Yet still I hesitated; always when I face death at close quarters, particularly premature death, I am appalled at the waste involved. Here was a hitherto healthy body, a keen mind, a brave spirit—a youth who had been a joy to his parents and friends, who might easily have been a beneficent influence in the world if his star had not led him astray. And now his life had to be wasted. So I hesitated, until Mitza, clutching suddenly at my elbow, forced my finger to press abruptly on the trigger. I was not expecting her grip, however, and my shot—at a range of four feet—went wide!

Now, however, I steeled myself, for I saw an added glint of agony in the dying man's eyes. At least I would not torture him. I took a deliberate aim at his heart; but just as my finger tightened on the trigger, his eyes closed again, and he slipped back into a welcome unconsciousness.

With a sigh of unmistakable relief at evading my ordeal, I left the insensible man and returned to my inspection of the accumulated stores and their explanatory documents. The sudden tension, however, had reminded me of my physical weariness—I looked at my watch, and found that it was now long after midnight. Time had no significance in this underground cavern, but the toil of the journey and the attendant mental strain suggested rest.

I was relieved to find that the garrison of the place had an ample supply of blankets, which they had laid over boxes so as to avoid cold contact with the rock floor. I

helped Mitza prepare one of these crude couches for our rest.

"Look," I said. "I don't think there is the slightest danger, for obviously these men were not expecting relief for another three or four days. Nevertheless, I think that one of us ought to remain awake and on guard. And, after all, there is always that man there"—and I indicated the unconscious man lying where I had shot him.

As if he realised instinctively that I was talking about him, he stirred uneasily, and another moan escaped his lips. Again I felt a quickening of the pulse, for if his shrieks began again, then obviously I would have to face the problem of killing him. But as I walked towards him, I saw that my dilemma had resolved itself; that movement was a last dying shudder, and the low moan was but the precursor of the death rattle in his throat. I must confess that I had no feeling of remorse as I saw him die—I sensed only relief in that I had escaped killing him in cold blood.

"Well, he is dead," I said to Mitza. "But still I think that one of us ought to keep awake. Now you shall rest first: go to sleep for a few hours and then I will take my turn."

She obeyed willingly, for she was obviously weary. One of the attributes of a gypsy is the ability to sleep at any time and in any discomfort, and within five minutes, despite the unfamiliar surroundings and the strain of the situation, Mitza was asleep. I sat on one of the box couches, a blanket around me to keep out the cold—I had forgotten the temperature in the excitement of

action. Never have I known such an unnatural silence, when even Mitza's deep breathing seemed noisy. Once, indeed, I was alarmed as a stone trickled down the rough alley by which we had gained the cave. I could well appreciate the protests of one of the dead men, that a week of this place, even in company, was too trying for the nerves.

After four hours I awoke Mitza.

"Just three hours will do for me, Mitza," I said. "Here's my watch. Wake me at eight o'clock. Now there's nothing at all to be afraid of. All you have to do is to watch that end of the cave"—and I indicated the entrance on the Ceuta side. "If anyone comes, shoot at sight—you know how to use my revolver. Actually, of course, you would hear them coming long before they arrived here, and you would have plenty of time to wake me up. But all this is precautionary—nothing will happen—nothing can happen."

Yet in spite of my assurance she was obviously frightened.

"Why, Mitza, what's the matter?" I asked, surprised.

"Don't leave me," she whispered. "I am afraid!"

"I am not going to leave you, Mitza," I said. "I just want to sleep for a few hours."

"But to sleep is to leave me," she declared.

"This is nonsense, and unlike you, Mitza. Why are you afraid? I tell you you can wake me long before anyone could get into the cave."

"No, I am not afraid of that," she said, indicating the entrance to the cavern.

"Then what is it?" I persisted, for I knew of no other potential danger.

"I am afraid of these," she whispered, and pointed to the three dead men.

I ought to have known it earlier; I had a lot to learn about gypsy mentality. I am convinced that Mitza would have faced up bravely to an invasion from the Ceuta side, and would have used my revolver without hesitation; she had already shown that she was not afraid of killing—but she was definitely afraid of death.

It was impossible to argue with her fear, so I compromised by lying down without sleeping. Every few minutes she would glance at me fearfully, to ensure that I was awake, and from time to time she would talk to me—in whispered sentences, as if ashamed or afraid of being heard. Although lacking the refreshing grace of sleep, I rested contentedly. Maybe I could not have slept, for my mind was too active; once I had felt that having penetrated the mystery I would be satisfied. Now I had gathered up its details in a fashion beyond my wildest dream, yet I found that my mind was concentrated on the next step. There must be no bungling. What was more, I must defeat this plot—or at least this part of the plot—myself. I could return to Gibraltar and disclose it officially, and a company of engineers would soon make short work of that tunnel. But that would be to defeat my cherished object—it would reveal the plot, and in its revelation would start off all kinds of international complications. Already I had noted that the ammonal was of German manufacture. I had no doubt whatsoever

(and have subsequently confirmed) that this ammonal had been bought from Germany in the ordinary way of commercial business, without a suggestion or hint of its real purpose, but I knew only too well how the fact that the ammonal was German could be distorted so as to inflame popular feeling.

Yet, as I considered the problem, I chuckled aloud—so suddenly that Mitza jumped up in her fear; for when I thought of it, if the plotters had been trying to help me they could not have done better. The ammonal, the electric leads, the batteries and plungers had been brought to blow in the galleries of Gibraltar. If I could only employ them correctly, they could be equally usefully employed to blow in the tunnel.

I had no practical experience of mining engineering, but I did once assist in the editing of a history of the Tunnelling Companies during the World War, and had picked up a smattering of technical information. At least I knew the elementary principles involved and with all necessities to hand—one of the exploders even carried a diagram in its case, showing how it should be used and how the leads should be fixed in position.

My decision once made, I decided to get up and set to work—obviously some real hard labour was before me. Mitza was preparing a meal. Wisely, she had retained the rations in our own haversacks, and had helped herself from the stores of the cave garrison. Evidently Castillo was doing his men very well, for their food was plentiful and varied.

We had finished our meal, and I was smoking a quiet cigarette preparatory to loosening my muscles for heavy

labour, when I saw Mitza's eyes startle and turn towards the mouth of the cave on the Ceuta side.

"What's the matter, Mitza?" I asked.

"Listen!"

I listened, but could hear nothing; yet a gypsy's ears were naturally more delicately attuned than mine.

"Listen!" she said again, a few seconds later. "*Someone is coming!*"

"You are certain?—I can hear nothing."

"*I tell you someone is coming!*" she repeated.

CHAPTER XIII

INSTANT ACTION WAS necessary, and I took it.

"Look, Mitza," I said hurriedly. "If you are right, it may be nothing more than two or three apes, in which case there is nothing to worry about—I will shoot them, if it is necessary. If the newcomers are men, however, then we must do this: If there are many of them, we take cover behind that rock, and I shall shoot them down—you must not get alarmed or cry out, because I must let them all come into the cave before I shoot; otherwise they will have the same advantage as we had over the others yesterday. But if the sounds, when they get nearer, indicate that there are only one or two men, then we will try to take them alive—they may have information to give us."

She understood the orders I gave—she was quite calm, in strange contrast to her terror of the dead men some hours previously. By this time, listening hard, I could myself hear sounds.

"That is no monkey," Mitza said. "A monkey would not make sounds on the rock. It is a man—one man, I believe. Yes," she confirmed a few seconds later, "it is one man only."

"Very well," I said. "Now you know what to do."

She did, and did it well. We took up our positions, and after an unconscionable time of waiting, a human figure suddenly appeared from the mouth of the tunnel. He had

been stooping, and as he drew himself up to gaze at the body of his comrade close to his feet, I flung myself on his back.

I was much heavier than he was, and he went sprawling on the floor. Even before he could struggle, Mitza was beside me, and in a few seconds we had our captive securely bound. He appeared to have broken his nose in the fall, but otherwise was unharmed.

In other circumstances it would have been comic to see the amazement on his face as he stared up and saw a man and a woman, both gypsies, bending over him. I spent a few minutes mopping up the blood pouring from his nose, and making him a little more comfortable, and then prepared to talk.

“What does all this mean?” he said.

“Never mind what it means. Why have you come?”

“I won’t tell you!” he cried. “There is something wrong here. I don’t understand it, but there is something wrong!”

He was quite right, of course—there was something wrong, from his point of view, very definitely. I asked another dozen questions, but got no informative reply. I was not concerned, as I began to search him. These young Fascists appeared to be running on military lines, as is their usual custom. They would scarcely give a verbal order when a written one would do. The full notes and plans of the scheme which I had found on the body of the dead José were in the true military tradition.

Sure enough, I found in the newcomer’s pockets a message addressed to the dead man. I tore it open,

ignoring his cries of anger. 'Circumstances have arisen which make it imperative for us to act quickly,' the order ran. 'I cannot yet state the exact time, but it will be about ten days from now. You must begin to move forward stores, as detailed in orders, for the first phase of the attack. A fatigue party is on its way from Algeciras and should be with you within forty-eight hours, or three days at the outside. Before it arrives, get all stores transported as far forward as is practicable.' The order was simply signed, 'By Order of the Chief,' and initialled.

In a book of fiction, the hero usually foils the plot in the very nick of time: confronted with the present plot, he would certainly not have discovered its roots until the explosives and gas were actually positioned under Gibraltar, and men waiting at the cylinders and plungers ready for the word 'Go.' Then, in some miraculous and superhuman fashion, he would have foiled them. I am not the hero of a story book, and I like to have plenty of time. For that matter, it might prove that even two days were not enough for the task before me. I knew that I would be most uncomfortable on the second day—I could visualise so easily an eager band of youthful volunteers hurrying over from Algeciras to Ceuta, and then, after being equipped, making their way along the tunnel. I decided that everything that had to be done should be done to-day.

Only pausing to make certain that our captive was firmly bound, I called to Mitza to come with me. First we picked up a case of ammonal. Breaking open the case, I was relieved to find that the explosive had been packed

in linen sandbags for easier transportation; each bag weighed about thirty pounds, and one of the bags fortunately fitted in our haversacks. Thus laden, we scrambled along the rough incline which we had descended to the cave. In my hand I carried two small exploders, which were part of the equipment. The going was sometimes difficult because of the rugged rock or pieces of stone beneath our feet, or particularly because of the narrowness of the passage, but we gained the side of the underground lake without incident, dumped our packages and returned for more. Six times we made the journey, then added a special trip for a load of sandbags. Next we ferried the whole lot over to the other side—in some ways the most delicate part of the whole transportation, for folding canoes were scarcely intended for the carriage of human beings heavily laden.

Not far beyond the lake, however, was a stretch of tunnel which, I remembered, was admirably suited for my purpose—which, fairly obviously, was to blow in the tunnel so completely that it could never be re-opened. The latter part of the journey was difficult indeed—any miner will tell you that it is not the easiest task to crawl along a tunnel about three feet square, carrying thirty pounds of ammonal with you. With much labour and with some scratches, however, we got all our equipment in position, then made a final journey back to the cave to bring picks and shovels.

In the excitement of the arduous labour, I had almost forgotten our new captive. Now I wondered what on earth I could do with him! This time there was no question of

killing to put a man out of his misery—if I killed this man, it would be plain murder. Mitza advised it, nevertheless—and logically, of course, she was quite right; the man was an enemy and potentially dangerous. Yet as I had hesitated to kill the unfortunate Fascist who was already dying, the reader will understand my reluctance to kill a healthy man—unharmed, except for a broken nose.

I decided at last to take him with us back to Gibraltar. I didn't know quite what I would do with him there, but the postponement of the problem would give me time to think out a suitable solution. I explained this to him as I untied his bonds. He would walk in front of me; he could scarcely escape, and if he made the slightest suspicious move I would shoot him dead without compunction. He nodded his understanding of my orders, and he stood awkwardly marking time and stamping his feet so as to restore life to his cramped muscles. He walked half a dozen steps in front of me; then, glancing round, saw that I was putting my revolver in my pocket, the better to handle my pick and shovel.

The fool! Only an impetuous youth, ignorant of the tactics of combat, would ever have done it. I saw an eager glint in his eyes—I read quite clearly his sudden decision. 'If I can gain the entrance to the tunnel,' he was arguing, 'I am safe. Not only am I safe, but I can hurry back and warn my friends. Yes, I'll make a dash for it—only ten yards to safety!'

He made his dash, but did not cover half of those ten yards. One of the first things you learn when you mix in shady affairs is the art of shooting accurately from

the pocket. Mitza was the first to reach the fallen man.

"He is dead," she announced. "Maybe it is just as well. He might have been awkward in the tunnel." $\frac{5}{6}$

She was right. If I were to be burdened with picks and shovels, struggling for a foothold along a rough path, he might have been very troublesome—he might have brained me with a piece of rock before I could move. Yes, I agreed that I had not thought out this problem very clearly, and that it was just as well that the man had acted as he did.

Yet, of course, in some ways his death was a comedy. Had I related my experiences in Spain and had explained that the man had died while trying to escape, everyone would have laughed aloud, for in unhappy Spain to-day the *ley de fugas* is freely invoked—you do not murder your prisoners, but you shoot them while they are 'trying to escape.' It is marvellous how many thousand prisoners have 'tried to escape' during the present civil war: so great a number has not been known since the unhappy days in Ireland. But my captive did—and failed!

We hurried back now to the scene of action. Although apparently unknown to the aforesaid hero of a story book, it is not enough to detonate your explosives—if you do not provide the explosive with a limited area of destruction, it will waste its force in a dozen directions—maybe the directions which you least desire. Before laying our charge, therefore, we had to begin to fill in the end of the tunnel which we had now left behind us. I had to make an estimation, but guessed that twelve feet of tamping was necessary.

Adequate tamping, I remembered, was the essence of military mining. A footnote from my book recalled itself to me: 'It is not enough to fire a charge placed at the end of a gallery. Since the force of the consequent explosion follows the line of least resistance, this force would flow along the uninterrupted galleries and the earth above would scarcely be disturbed; consequently, when the charge has been placed in position, the gallery behind it must be filled in and made stronger than the earth above the charge. This filling behind the charge is called tamping. It need not consist of one solid mass of sand-bags, as gaps, or air spaces, between successive masses of sand-bags help to withstand the shock of the explosion. Sometimes, timbers are strutted across the gallery to stiffen the tamping.'¹

We had no earth with which to fill our sand-bags, but there was an ample supply of loose stones, which would be equally effective. The work was so hard that more than once I was tempted to cut down the length of my tamping. I argued, quite rightly, that my intention was not to blow out the ground above in the fashion of military mining, but merely to ruin the gallery utterly and completely. Yet I resisted the temptation, because I was now confident. There were piles of sand-bags between us and any potential pursuers.

Not that pursuit was likely. I did not envy the lot of the advancing fatigue party, for at the very moment of leaving the cave I had taken one final precaution against outside interference. I have explained that there was a slight

¹ See *Tunnellers*, by Captain W. G. Grieve and Bernard Newman.

current of air moving along the tunnel—from the Gibraltar side towards Africa. I had carried one of the gas containers a hundred yards down the tunnel towards Ceuta, therefore, and had opened its neck by a fraction—just enough to let the gas seep through in small quantities. By the time the fatigue party arrived the next day, a good quarter mile of tunnel ought to be thoroughly impregnated—and if they had any sense they would not advance further, certainly not without adequate gas masks.

Mitza, understanding nothing of the operation, worked fiercely in carrying out my directions. With pain and labour we had carried two hundredweights of ammonal, which I now placed in a suitable position—although the tunnel was low and narrow, the rocks up above were loose and jagged, and could obviously be easily persuaded to fall in a confused mass. Then we laid out the connecting wires, and the last part of our labour commenced—for it was, of course, essential to fill in tamping on the other side of the charge. It was wickedly hard and heavy work, doubly so because of the narrow confines of the tunnel. To Mitza it must have been torture, but she uttered no complaint. Our hands were rough and blistered as we toiled through the evening and the night.

At last it was finished. Nevertheless, distrusting my own handiwork and always hesitant lest I had left unfulfilled the first essential of mining and had put in insufficient tamping, I ran the wires along the ground to their extremities—which must have been a good quarter of a mile from the scene of the potential explosion. Then,

finding the diagram an exact and admirable guide, I fitted the exploder into position.

Despite my utter weariness, I could not resist the excitement of the moment. I had no small apprehension, too—if I had not done the job properly, then I must reveal the plot at Gibraltar and so incur all the consequences I had sought to avoid.

I hesitated for many minutes before I rammed the plunger home. The seconds that followed were agonising—for an incredible time no sound disturbed the utter stillness of the tunnel. Then a sharp, short crack and a dull muffled rumble echoed along the tunnel till it reached us. Despite our distance, its roar was so mighty that we clapped our hands to our ears, and I was seriously alarmed, thinking that my protective tamping was indeed too narrow.

But the thunder passed, and only its echoing reverberations smote our ears.

“It’s all right, Mitza,” I comforted, as she flung her arms about me as the volume of sound passed us by. “It’s all right! We’ve won—the Gibraltar Tunnel is destroyed!”

She didn’t seem to care very much about that—maybe she was too weary for anything. Her spirits, which had been high during the action, now drooped suddenly, in true southern fashion. I first tried to comfort her by gentle jests: I hoped that there were plenty of apes on Gibraltar at the moment, I said, so that the breed should be carried on; for now, assuredly, they would never be able to go back to Africa to fetch new wives from over

there. So I chattered inconsequentially—until I discovered that Mitza was asleep.

I felt that I had earned a sleep myself. We had one blanket, which we had carried from the cave. This I folded, and laid it on the cold rock. Mitza and I lay down together. This time no mental activity disturbed me; my plans were now consummated, and I did sleep indeed.

I was in the middle of a beautiful dream, in which I was lying between white sheets and a man was preparing a bath while another prepared a breakfast of grilled kidneys, when I awoke suddenly, to find Mitza shaking me.

“*Rom, rom, wake!*” she cried, and there was a fear in her voice which made me struggle back to consciousness far more rapidly than is my wont.

“What’s the matter?” I asked sharply.

“Look!” she cried. “Feel!”

And I suddenly realised that the blanket was wet through, and that an inch of water now covered the floor of the tunnel.

“What does it mean, *rom*?” she cried again. “This water was not here half an hour ago—I am certain—I was awake then.”

A sudden light flashed through my brain; I dipped my fingers in the water and sucked them.

“My God!” I shouted, “*the water’s salt.* Come, Mitza, quickly—our explosion must have let the sea into the tunnel!”

CHAPTER XIV

I DROVE HER before me as we rushed along the tunnel at the greatest speed its confines would allow. Evidently we were nearer to the sea floor than I had imagined, or alternatively there was more than one of those strange underground lakes. Our explosion must have blown a hole into the roof of the tunnel and had let in the water.

Yet, as I hurried along, I was still puzzled—if the sea, with all its force, had burst into the tunnel, how could the slow rise be explained? So far as I could remember, we were not yet near the point where El Mono had been frightened because, as he had said, this was where the tunnel went under the sea.

However, there was no time to argue—even at this stage I do not know the real explanation, although I suspect that not the sea proper but another of the underground water deposits was diverted into the tunnel. In two or three hundred yards of gradual ascent we had left all traces of water behind. I was still nervous, however, for I remembered that another considerable descent lay before us, and it was easy to imagine what would happen if the rising waters covered the crest of the ridge of rock which we were mounting. El Mono's amble had been too warm for us on the outward journey, but it was slow compared with our return; yet all the while I was

desperately anxious about Mitza. She had endured forty-eight hours of intolerable physical strain ; she was travelling on her nerves, and I feared collapse at any moment. Then our case would indeed be desperate, for it would be almost impossible to carry her.

Yet the crisis had to be faced. We had been crawling through another section of low tunnel and had gained a wider space beyond it, where we could walk side by side. Suddenly I felt Mitza grip at my arm and, turning to her, found that she had sunk to her knees.

“Come, Mitza,” I urged. “One more effort; another half hour, and we shall be safe.”

“Oh, my *rom*,” she whispered, “I can go no further. I have been forcing myself for the last hour. You must leave me here.”

“Rubbish, Mitza!” I exclaimed, and I meant it. As I have frequently said, and as my actions throughout the book often prove, I am no hero of a Ouida romance, but not in any circumstances would I have abandoned Mitza to her fate.

“You must go on, *rom*,” she pleaded, love in her voice. “Remember only that I loved you, and think of me.”

But I refused to be sentimental.

“Come along, Mitza!” I ordered. “Put your arm around my neck; I’ll take your waist. I am not leaving you; you come with me.”

She tried desperately hard, but her legs had lost their use. For a while, at least, I could carry her, and I hoisted her on to my back. A precious hundred yards was gained, then a considerable climb faced us. I recognised it;

if we could make this ascent, then we could laugh at the pursuing water. I felt my own strength failing as I half carried, half dragged Mitza up the uneven slope. Nevertheless, fear urged me forward. I am not more afraid of death than the next man, but I am a man of the open air, and would have welcomed ten deaths beneath the blue sky rather than one like this that threatened, drowning like the proverbial rat in a miserable tunnel. So, despite the intense cold, I sweated in my labour as I scrambled forward a few yards at a time. My eyes were open, but something had gone wrong with the intricate mechanism that carried their impressions to the brain; yet at least I was thrilled as I noted some of the chalk marks I had made, and realised that I was above sea level.

I could strive no more. Instead, in the excitement of safety, I sank down on the floor of the tunnel beside the unconscious Mitza. I had not the strength to attempt to revive her, but almost instinctively I lay pressed close to her, so that our bodies might give warmth, one to the other.

I must have lain like this for an hour or more, until the coldness of the rock revived me. Gradually my thoughts took conscious shape. I was safe from the unnatural perils which had threatened me. A little clear thinking —command of myself and my own energies for another hour or two, and then I could rest. It would be fatal to linger here; it would be bathos indeed, if, having escaped death so dramatically, Mitza and I were to die of exposure.

I fumbled in my knapsack and found the little flask of spirit which I carried as a last reserve. It was no easy task to force a generous portion down Mitza's throat. I dashed water from another bottle over her forehead and against her breasts—this latter method is not so conventional as the former, but is far more effective. Soon she recovered her senses, although the power to use her limbs had still gone. She tried hard and pathetically to walk, clinging heavily to my arm. Somehow I had to make her walk—my own strength was so sapped that I could not carry her further. The spirit flask solved the problem. It was not a pretty method, but it worked. Mitza, unused to spirits, fell to their potent influence. Suitably dosed, she became half tipsy, and in a forced and unnatural strength walked awkwardly along the rugged tunnel.

I shivered instinctively as, after an age of weary travail, we splashed through that shallow stream which had been intended for such deadly purpose. Half an hour later I gave a great cry, for staring ahead I saw a pin-point of light. Mitza and I, hand in hand, blundered towards it, and a few moments later were blinking in the violent sunshine. Our eyes ached as we looked about us—this gaunt grey rock with its beautiful blue sea. Our limbs were almost uncontrollable as we staggered along the rocky path and stumbled into the gypsy hovel. Our host would have poured questions upon us, but I halted him very abruptly and he perceived our exhaustion. We lay on our filthy beds, Mitza and I, side by side. Our host kindly cleared the playing children out of the room, so that we

could sleep in peace. It was nice of him, but he need not have bothered—the Angel Gabriel and all his trumpeters could not have awakened me. I slept for twenty hours, and when I awoke Mitza was still asleep.

I left her there while, every muscle of my body aching, I walked into Gibraltar. I had not the nerve to present myself at Government House in my present filthy and ragged condition, but I telephoned to my friend and arranged to meet him as if by accident in the shady gardens of the Alameda. They were deserted, for it was the early afternoon and most sensible inhabitants of the Rock were enjoying their siesta.

My friend and I, meeting apparently casually, shared a bench in the pleasant park. I passed over to him the papers and plans which I had taken from the pocket of the dead man in the cave.

“But this is fantastic—I don’t believe it,” he ejaculated, ten minutes later. “This is impossible, it will never happen.”

“No,” I agreed, “it will never happen—but it might have done!”

He stared at me as if he did not believe me—which was quite a comprehensible attitude on his part.

“Look here,” he said. “You seem to me to be a bit off colour; yes, you’ve obviously been into some mess or other. Are you quite sure it hasn’t turned your brain? You mean to tell me that this plot is serious?”

“Say, rather, this plot *was* serious,” I corrected.

“But man, you must come with me to the Governor, at once.”

"No, you fathead," I howled. "Didn't I tell you that that was the last thing I wanted to do?"

"But this is desperately serious," he argued. "You needn't worry—the Governor's a damned good man; you can trust his discretion."

"I know that," I said. "But if I do hand over the story to him, he's bound to take official action—he couldn't do otherwise."

"But you can't expect me——" he began.

"No, I don't," I agreed, and very rudely I snatched back the papers I had presented to him. What he would have thought had he read to the end I don't know. I saw that perhaps I had made a tactical error in showing them to him at all. It was fortunate that he had only read the first part, involving the attack on the gallery.

"Now there's nothing to worry about, and you needn't try any official tricks—you've got to play the game; no arresting me, and pinching the papers from me. Look here, I assure you on my honour that this scheme is *caput*. I blew in that tunnel, and the sea's in it. Anybody who was in the tunnel at the time is dead, and it is utterly impossible for anybody else to think of using it for ever and ever. If you like, you can send your engineers to investigate—there's no harm in that; you can easily think out a good story—some reason for exploring the caves."

I told him how to enter the tunnel—for, on second thoughts, there was the faintest risk that some of the plotters might enter it from the Gibraltar end. They could not carry out their scheme, of course—you can't

carry sacks of explosives about Gibraltar—but they might attempt to poison that underground stream. I suggested to him that he should blow in the entrance of the cave—but didn't tell him why.

“But are you quite sure that this is the whole of the plot?” he hesitated.

“No, it isn't,” I said, “but it's easily the most serious part of it. They called it a diversion, but the other part consists of a plain attack on Gibraltar. I take it that you are still confident of your ability to meet that.”

He merely grinned. “I've already told you that you needn't lose any sleep about that!” he confirmed.

“Right, leave it to me! I've got one more oar I can push in, and then the boat capsizes completely. I've explained previously that I am not afraid of the attack, but the attempt. I want the whole affair hushed up.”

“But I don't really see——”

“I know you don't. You're a soldier, and you're not concerned with European affairs. You ought to be. You grumble at the politicians because they don't flourish a big stick and because they sometimes appear to take things lying down. You can't realise how delicately Europe is balanced at the moment, when a wrong word or a wrong gesture may tip over the whole scale: national pride is one thing, but war is another. Remember, too, in these days there is no such thing as a national war—you're bound to bring in the rest of Europe, maybe the world, before it's gone on very long. No, I don't want any arguments over this fool plot. It's my affair, and I'm going to make the decision, whether you like it or not.

You can do nothing without me—if you went with this story to the Governor without any confirmation he'd think you were crackers, and send you home on six months' leave.

He scratched his head, realising the justification in my remark.

“Now I assure you,” I continued, “that there’s nothing at all to worry about. Could you just do one thing? Pass the wink to the Customs Officers at the Land Gate and the port to be far more strict than they have been. They’ve done their job well enough for ordinary times, but to-day isn’t normal. You can easily justify your caution—everybody knows that Spain is on the verge of some sort of civil war, and you can give out the story that smuggling of arms or money or something or other is suspected. They’re a good lot of fellows, you can leave it to them. In particular you can pass them this hint—to watch very carefully any man who comes into Gibraltar carrying a water bottle with him.”

“A water bottle?” he exclaimed, “but why a water bottle?”

“Never mind why,” I said.

“But damn it you can’t leave me in the air like this,” he complained.

“I can, and I’m going to,” I insisted. I might have told you the whole story, but now I’m very much afraid that you’d take it to the Governor, so you’ll have to wait for another few days until the whole affair has blown over. But take me seriously; do pass on my hint, particularly about the water bottles.”

He agreed reluctantly, and after promising to meet him shortly and complete the story, I left him, still puzzling why an innocent water bottle could be conspicuous. Goodness knows what his state of mind would have been had I told him of the plot to poison the entire population of Gibraltar.

I went down to the Post Office to see if there were any mail for me. There was, but the clerk very naturally refused to hand over the letters of Captain Bernard Newman to the scruffy individual who demanded them. A wash and shave were obviously indicated, after which I was able to return to the little hotel where I had deposited my small baggage.

Two letters awaited me: one from Margaret—the contents of which are strictly personal. The other, scarcely less exciting, was from Wallis, the private agent Marshall had despatched to Salamanca. It was obvious that Wallis had picked up the threads very well—true, Salamanca was in such disturbed state that a man could move easily in unusual places in an atmosphere in which men's tongues wagged far more freely than sometimes they ought. Wallis's report was brief but highly edifying.

After the usual preliminaries—Wallis was an ex-policeman, and had to begin by describing his arrival at 7.15 p.m. on the 29th ult., he went on to write in more conversational terms as the interest of his story overcame the official jargon. "Although many events had already occurred by the time I arrived at Salamanca, by official and unofficial enquiries I was able to obtain a reasonably accurate summary of the facts. It appears that after your

escape the Communists got scared. As soon as they found you had gone, there was great confusion in the house on the outskirts of the city. They naturally assumed that you would go direct to the Civil Guards, and promptly abandoned the house. In the confusion Señor Castillo escaped—and he, of course, *did* go at once to the Civil Guards. They raided the house, but by this time it was deserted; all they could find were three or four bodies buried in the garden. Some of them were those of men who had been missing for some weeks, but one was the officer, Vicente, of whom Inspector Marshall spoke to me.

“On the morning following my arrival, there were sensational reports in some of the newspapers and excited discussions in the cafés. I would strongly suggest that you do not return to Salamanca for some time—at least, not unless heavily disguised, for I fear that you are now very unpopular with a certain section of the community. The letter found upon you by the Communists—the one ‘signed’ by General Boring—was naturally immediately transmitted by the local leaders to their headquarters—I understand that these are at Barcelona and not at Madrid. Here the letter was hailed as a proof of German interference in Spanish national affairs, and its text was promptly published in several left-wing newspapers. Some of them, so as to show how genuine it was, published it in facsimile, with very violent comments about foreigners who were trying to extend their bloody creed to Spain.

“I have been unable to ascertain, as I did not think it wise to leave Salamanca for Madrid, whether the Spanish Government actually complained to the German

ambassador, but he very wisely took up the matter and was able to prove without much difficulty that the letter was a forgery. His proofs were so emphatic that even the Communists, although it must have gone against the grain, had to admit that he was right, and on the morning to which I refer there was a wave of indignation at the way in which you had fooled them. Naturally, they now suspected the other extreme—that you were a Fascist spy planted among them. The Fascists are also very annoyed with you, because you had deceived them so badly. In short, I fear that Salamanca is rather an unhealthy place for you at the moment.

“In any case, however, if you believe that Castillo holds the key to the situation, he has left Salamanca. He took the night train for Madrid last night, but I found an enquiry at the railway station that he had taken a ticket for Algeciras. As, I understand, Algeciras is very near to Gibraltar. I am leaving that end of the trail for you to pick up, but will come on at once if I can be of any assistance; otherwise I shall hang on here awaiting Castillo’s return, and frequenting the cafés hoping to pick up information.”

This was news, interesting and exciting. Nevertheless I was not seriously perturbed. Vicente was dead; true, he had done most of his work, and Castillo was the driving force of the plot. Yet when Castillo discovered that his much-vaunted diversion was now wrecked, surely he would abandon his plan. Surely not even a fanatic would attempt to attack the massive fortress of Gibraltar while its defences were complete and its defenders alert.

I would have given a good deal to know how much he knew I knew. He would obviously try to recall what part of the plot had been given away. I hoped that his memory would deceive him—that he would think that I knew everything that mattered; then indeed he would be mad if he made his attempt, for assuredly on my escape I would go and give official warning of the plot. But was he such a fanatic that he would not think along those lines? I had to agree that he was one of those enthusiasts who ignores difficulties and can only see the goal. Although I imagine that the real period of danger was passed, at least I could not leave matters where they stood.

I must confess that by this stage I had tired of the affair. Violent physical exertion saps the spirit. I had raised myself to the correct psychological pitch in my adventures in the tunnel, but now came the natural reaction. I found that I was thinking and longing for a spell of peace and quiet—and Margaret. (I noticed that I forgot poor Mitza when I thought of Margaret.) These miserable Fascists had given me too much trouble. Now that the plot was defeated, I wanted a quick, clean denouement, in the fashion of the detective stories. To-morrow, maybe, I could sail for England—and Margaret. I was somewhat optimistic!

I gave a boy pennies to take a note to Mitza, and two hours later she met me at the appointed place. She had now slept off her fatigue, but her limbs, like mine, still felt the effects of their excruciating ordeal.

"Well, Mitza," I said, "the affair is nearly over—the worst is over. I'm going over to Algeciras; would you rather stay here or come with me?"

Her eyes flashed reproach. "How can my *rom* ask such a question?" she said.

"Very well," I agreed, "though we shall have to move separately. For this journey I must be an Englishman again."

"I do not care, so long as I can be near you," she said. "I am afraid for you—I do not understand what all this is about. When you talk to me of Fascists and Communists, I hardly know what you mean. I only know that you are in danger, and I want to be near you. So long as I can see you, then I shall be happy."

As we sailed over the bay, I thought hard over the simple plan I had evolved. There was a Fascist attack projected, if the collapse of the 'diversion' did not kill it. To thwart it I must have allies; I had deliberately declined the official aid which would have smashed the plot immediately, although it would have raised endless complications, but other natural allies were available. It is now a well-accepted axiom that Fascism breeds Communism, and Communism Fascism, and I was quite certain that I would find both Fascists and Communists at Algeciras. Even before I searched for Castillo, indeed, I proposed to seek out some of the more enterprising Communist leaders and to take them to some extent into my confidence.

In this I made a very bad mistake—Castillo was a first-class opponent and I ought to have dealt with him

first. It was almost dark as I landed in Algeciras, and I made my way immediately to a small hotel close by the quay. I would have sworn that I was unobserved, but I was wrong, as I was to find to my cost.

Under cover of darkness I made my way to one of the cafés frequented by the Communists. It was an unpretentious affair in a back street. For people who believe so forcibly in the brotherhood of man, Communists are a singularly untrustful lot—probably they have reason to be—and I had to drink considerably more than I cared before I got on the slightest terms of intimacy with any of them. It took me more than an hour, in fact, to find out the name of the local leader—of course, they may have suspected that I was an official spy, but even the police must have known that Señor Mestas was the local Communist leader.

I gathered that he was not expected at the café—that he was not even a habitué. I got the impression that he was a scholar, and preferred to spend his evenings at home studying the works of the master.

I found that he occupied a room in a tenement building. It appeared to be well guarded by his followers, for two men challenged me as I entered the house, and a third halted me as I mounted the final flight of stairs. I had to send a message in to the Communist leader—I sat on the stairs and wrote it out—an urgent message, vital and important. Of course he did not know me from Adam, but maybe the novelty of a visiting Englishman influenced him, for without ado I was admitted to his room.

Nevertheless my first request aroused some suspicion. There were two other men with him, and I asked that they should withdraw.

"But they are my friends," he said. "I have no secrets from them."

"But I have, señor," I countered. "What I have to say is for your ears alone."

"This is not an auspicious beginning to the conversation you promise in your note," he commented.

"It is worse than that," said the man who had sat on the stairs. "It looks as if he is a spy—maybe he has come to kill you."

"I suggest then that you should search me," I said, holding up my hands. "Then maybe you would be satisfied."

The guardian of the stairs took me at my word, and ran his fingers over me in quite an expert fashion. Still he stood facing me, unconvinced; but suddenly the Communist leader said,

"You will leave us. I can trust this man, I know it."

They trusted him, too—for they obeyed him implicitly and withdrew. A casual glance around the room revealed the character of the man I had to face. Its furniture was good but dilapidated, but every square inch of spare space was occupied by books. They were stacked up by the hundred against the wall—his rough shelves had hopelessly overflowed. There were papers everywhere—he had actually been writing at a wooden table on my entry. I knew the type well—there would be no difficulty in persuading him that my story was genuine; my

real task would begin when I tried to rouse him to action.

"This is a strange story," I began. "Let me begin by saying that I have come to you as a friend—I have come to you to ask for an alliance—a temporary alliance, maybe, but against a common enemy. I tell you frankly that I am not a Communist (immediate recognition of the man's character had prompted me to throw overboard the usual subterfuge) but at least I can say that I dislike Fascism as much as you do. Because of that I have come to you."

Then briefly and without any details I sketched out to him the Fascist plot to capture Gibraltar. I made no mention of the tunnel, but spoke only of the plan to seize the town by a *coup d'état*. I was beginning to point out its implications; how if it were attempted—I was quite certain that it would never succeed—the wrath of England might be turned upon Spain at a most unfortunate moment; that reprisal might become the order of the day, and that anything might happen in the consequent confusion.

I found that I did not need to develop the potentialities of the disaster; here at least was a keen student of European affairs, and he cut me short.

"That is quite enough, señor," he said, quietly. "There is no need for you to labour that point. My ideas about Gibraltar are not yours. You can scarcely expect me to be happy at the sight of this buttress of my native land in the hands of an imperial power. Obviously the Straits of Gibraltar ought to be internationally controlled. I would not ever claim Gibraltar

for my own country alone. However, there is no need for us to debate this point. I am with you fully when you say that such a plot must be prevented at all costs. What is more, I do not think there would be much difficulty in its prevention. All you have to do, señor, is to convince me that this plot does exist."

His arguments were typical of the man—the keen student, not the omnivorous reader of dope: here was a man with a brain who reasoned closely before every action.

"You are quite right, of course," I agreed. "I cannot expect you to take the word of a complete stranger for such a fantastic story as I have told you. But fortunately some sort of proof is possible. I understand from a friend at Salamanca that the newspapers there published a few days ago a considerable story about me."

And I briefly outlined the history of the General Boring letter.

"Ah, I heard something of that," he said, his eyes brightening. "Although not so fully as you have said. One of our newspapers published an extract from another in Barcelona bearing on this theme. Your idea, señor, makes things easier. You must not think that I am doubting your word, but only that in these days you have to be careful. Perhaps you will remain here as my guest for a few hours. In that time I shall communicate with friends at Salamanca. By to-morrow, doubts should be settled once and for all; then I am at your service."

His attitude was most reasonable, and I readily agreed to remain as his guest for the night.

It was the following evening, soon after the close of the siesta, that someone came to tell Mestas that he was wanted on the telephone—apparently he had a working arrangement with a wealthier tenant of another flat. Ten minutes later he came back to me, smiling.

“I am not surprised,” he said. “I have just been talking to a friend at Salamanca. He has been making enquiries about you, and I find, as I expected, that everything you told me was true. Well, henceforward, we are allies—we may not have the same aspirations, but at least we have a common enemy.”

“Even our aspirations may be the same,” I put in gently. “It is only in our methods of attaining the same end that we differ; for I, like you, burn with sympathy for the unfortunate folk of Spain, who have had such a raw deal for so many hundreds of years.”

“I have noted that sympathy in our conversation through the day,” he agreed. “Maybe I shall convert you to my own point of view. Yet, in any case, there is immediate action ahead of us. My party is holding a meeting to-night—I suggest that you should come to it with me. Not for the purpose of converting you”—and he smiled again—“but so that we can meet some of my committee men after it is over.”

I agreed, of course, and went along to the meeting. It was not exciting because it was so ordinary. Mestas made an excellent speech, well reasoned and full of quotations, but I doubt if more than ten per cent of his audience understood what he was talking about. However, they respected him, as the ignorant always do respect the

learned—a compelled respect, whether they like it or not. Other speakers, however, raised their emotions freely—they appealed to the baser passions of the under-dog, and knew full well how to raise fury and resentment.

The meeting of the committee was naturally to be held at a café after the meeting. I had been formally introduced, and we were walking in close conversation along a narrow street. I was very satisfied with the position, and quite convinced that these men would destroy the whole remnant of the Fascist plot on my behalf.

But all too suddenly things began to happen. I heard a burst of fire—the quick rat-tat-tat of a machine gun or its like, and was startled when I heard the bullets pattering on to the wall close beside me. The attack was so unexpected that I slipped over the kerbstone into the gutter, and fell heavily, banging my head. I suppose I must have been unconscious for a few seconds, for when I opened my eyes Mestas and two of his friends were leaning over me.

“Are you hit?” Mestas asked anxiously.

“Oh, no,” I said. “I just fell down, that’s all. What’s happening?”

“Oh, only another of those Fascist murder plots!” cried Mestas angrily. “How can they expect a peaceful Spain? We cannot hold a meeting but they attack us and murder some of our comrades.”

My brain, after its few seconds’ enforced rest, was working actively. Suddenly I perceived the germ of an excellent subterfuge.

"Look, Señor Mestas, I've an idea!" I said. "Pick me up and carry me into the nearest house, will you?—the nearest house you can trust, I mean—somewhere where one of your own people lives."

"But what is your idea?" he asked.

"I'll explain it inside," I insisted. My personality was strong enough to impose my will upon them. Very awkwardly they picked me up, and carried me carefully a few yards down the street; then into a house occupied by a sympathiser. I was ceremonially laid on a couch—and stayed there, in case spying eyes should intrude.

"And now what is the idea?" said Mestas, very puzzled.

"I don't believe this was an ordinary attack on Communists," I began. "If it were, why didn't they come earlier, when the meeting was just clearing out? Or if they wanted you and your committee, why didn't they sweep their machine gun, or whatever it was, over the whole lot of you. No, it seems to me that the whole blaze of bullets was directed against me. Why me? Why not you? You are their enemy, so far as they know."

"Yes, there's something in what you say," Mestas agreed.

"I believe that I have under-estimated these men. I thought that when I had destroyed their potential diversion in the Gibraltar tunnel I had killed the snake. It is obvious that I have only scotched it. By this time, of course, they will know that that part of their plan is dead—and it does not require a keen brain like Castillo's to calculate who has killed it. Yes, he has every motive for wanting to remove me."

"But how does he know that you were here?" Mestas queried.

"That I don't know; he may have seen me as I landed. Or, if you have been telephoning to Salamanca about me—well, there are a dozen people who might have listened in to your conversation, you know."

"Ah, that is true," he cried. "I was a fool not to think of it. In these days you can trust no one."

"You see my idea, now," I went on. "They wanted to kill me to get me out of the way; very well, they have killed me!"

"What!" exclaimed Mestas.

"Yes, I am dead. You will make a great song and dance about this murder of me—you can even announce me as an Englishman, an English sympathiser. I've no doubt your ingenuity is enough to stage a beautiful funeral for me—a funeral which incidentally might bring our opponents into the open."

The other men were grinning hugely as the plan was revealed to them, but Mestas obviously had doubts.

"But look here, won't they suspect?" he asked. "You have played this trick on them before—when the dead body of the gypsy was mistaken for you."

"No, I didn't play that trick myself," I corrected. "They deceived themselves. And, in any case, that is my first safeguard—they will never suspect that *I propose to use the same plot twice.*"

"No, there is something in that," Mestas said slowly.

"There is a lot in it," cried one of his lieutenants. "It's a beautiful scheme. I agree, they will never imagine

that the English señor would play the same trick twice. The plan is foolproof."

"But I don't quite see what we gain," Mestas persisted.

"It isn't quite what you gain, but what I gain," I answered. "I think it's fairly obvious that they mean to get me. As they failed this time, they'll try again to-morrow, and the day after—and my luck can't hold for ever. I'd rather they think that I'm dead now, and then they'll lay off."

My argument was incontrovertible; my plan was promptly adopted—and I must say that they played up to it nobly. Within an hour the word had gone round the town that an English Communist visitor had been murdered by the Fascists. So firm was the rumour that the British Vice-Consul at Algeciras actually began to make enquiries!

Before that, however, I had taken another of my periodical washes in coffee, and had passed through devious back streets to Mestas' apartments. I only stayed there to gather a few personal belongings, however; there was always the risk he might be visited by a Civil Guard making enquiries into my 'murder.' Instead, I joined Mitza, quite confident that not all the Fascists in Spain would recognise the English spy in the filthy gypsy who lounged about with his woman.

So confident was I in my disguise, in fact, that the next day I plunged boldly into the enemy camp. My invasion was quite easy—I had to buy a box and some boot brushes and polish. Spain suffers from a scourge of boot-blacks, and many of them are gypsies. Visitors complain that they cannot sit in a Spanish café without

being challenged a dozen times—not in words, but by reproachful glances at their boots or shoes. When in Spain as a tourist I have often had my shoes shined four times a day in order to keep up the very high standard which is set by these unofficial censors.

Naturally I concentrated on the cafés frequented by Fascists. It was fortunate that the drama was being played this way round, for while the Fascists were mostly young men, smartly dressed, the Communists hardly had the same care for their personal appearance. In each café I found two or three clients every time I visited it. My shoe-shining was long and thorough—I don't claim that it was expert. One client, in fact, made a legitimate complaint when I forgot to fit in the little pieces of cardboard by the sides of the shoes and so applied a considerable quantity of brown polish to his grey socks. As I worked, I kept my ears very wide open. No one took any notice of a gypsy boot-black—he is almost a part of the furniture in a Spanish café.

In a book, of course, I would have polished the shoes of one of the conspirators, who at the 'psychological moment' would have given away the whole plot. Conspirators are seldom so ingenuous as that, even before negligible people. But at least I did get hints, which were as much as I expected. Mitza, too, was very active, passing from table to table begging, and suffering the sexual badinage and backchat which the circumstances made inevitable. This time my little bit of espionage was more successful than hers, and late in the afternoon we sailed across the bay on the ferry to Gibraltar.

I telephoned to my friend, and once more he met me under the trees of the Alameda. I explained to him my conviction that although I had destroyed the diversion, the plot was not yet killed. I held him to his promise to help me so far as he legally could without revealing his action to his superiors. What I now wanted, however, was fairly simple. My deductions, from one of the hints I had picked up, led me to believe that despite the frontier search, the Fascists had gradually accumulated a cache of revolvers and ammunition in Gibraltar itself. They had not attempted to smuggle in the grand manner, but an occasional man—one only maybe in the thousand which crossed each day—had secreted a weapon and had evaded search. My friend, conscious of the vast strength of Gibraltar, was not seriously perturbed. He agreed, nevertheless, that potential trouble did exist and would be a nuisance, and that he would help me to nullify it.

A very early hour the following morning, therefore, found me squatting near the edge of the neutral ground at the La Linea frontier, on the Gibraltar side. My scheme was very simple. My friend on the Governor's staff had arranged with the chief of the Customs that specially intent search should be made that morning—but if a Customs Officer chanced upon a revolver, he should not find it!

I hoped that I would not have to wait too long, for I wanted to get back to Algeciras to see my own 'funeral.' By a coincidence that no writer of fiction dare use, the action developed within ten minutes of my arrival at the frontier. Actually, it was no great coincidence; I had

calculated that, if anyone wanted to do any smuggling at all, he would cross into Gibraltar at the same time as the hundreds of Spanish workmen who come in from La Linea every morning; most of them are known and are passed through rapidly. (They are searched pretty thoroughly by the Spanish frontier guards on their return!) It might even be—in fact, it was probable—that my man was one of these non-resident labourers.

In any event, no sooner had I squatted down comfortably, leaning against the wall of the Custom House, when I got the signal I had arranged. The astute Customs Officer, running his fingers expertly over an incoming labourer, had felt a revolver hidden in an inner pocket; but, as we had arranged, he had not 'found' it. Instead, he gave me a signal, and at a suitable distance I trailed my man into Gibraltar.

At the entrance to the town Mitza was awaiting me, and to avoid any possibility of suspicion she in turn took up the trail. It was just elementary police work, in which nondescripts like gypsies had an obvious advantage. Half an hour later she returned to me, and gave the address to which the suspected man had gone. As I suspected, he had merely called there for a couple of minutes, and then had gone out again—presumably to some regular job.

What should I do? I was getting rather nervous about the number of people necessarily implicated in the laying of the plot. Although my friend had charged them with secrecy, a dozen Customs officers must now know that something was afoot. The obvious next step was to

stage a police raid on the house—which would let even more people into the secret, and presumably could not be kept from the ears of the Governor himself. Before reporting our discovery, therefore, Mitza and I spied out the land—she as a gypsy beggar, and I in my old character of coppersmith. When we found that the sole occupants of the house were an elderly man and woman, it did not seem that official intervention was necessary!

A little later, therefore, I returned to the house.

“I have already told you that we have not pots which want mending,” the old lady exclaimed angrily.

“No, but I have something here for you,” I whispered, tapping my pocket. “I only wanted to be sure of the house.”

“Come in,” she said shortly, and shut the door after me.

In the living room of the house was the man.

“What is this?” he said. “I don’t even know you.”

“No, but you will,” I said. “This is only my first journey.”

“Ah!” he exclaimed. “How many have you got?”

“Only one,” I said, and I produced my own revolver from my pocket. “Only one—but it is loaded. Put up your hands, and make no sound!”

They were so startled that for some seconds they made no move. A few flourishes with my revolver, however, induced the necessary upraised arms.

“Stay as you are!” I ordered the man. “You”—to the woman—“turn to the wall, and put your hands close behind you!”

Overcome with fear, she did as I ordered. I had short lengths of light rope in my pocket already arranged in

slip knots. One of these I passed over her hands, and in a minute she was temporarily but securely bound.

"Now, you!" I commanded the man.

His hands once bound, I tackled them more thoroughly. First allowing Mitza to enter from the street, I forced them upstairs to a bedroom, and there bound their hands and feet securely and added a gag as a precaution.

With Mitza watching in a front room ready to give the alarm, I investigated the house, and found my quarry in a cellar. Here were automatics—later I counted them; there were one hundred and seventy-three in all—and an ample stock of ammunition. It was not difficult to arrange their disposal! There was a hammer in the cellar. One hundred and seventy-three hard blows, and those automatics were not particularly useful to their owners!

I went back to the bedroom and took out the gags from the mouths of my captives. They were still trembling in fear—with some justification, for so far as they knew they were due for a long stretch of imprisonment.

"Now, you realise what you've done?" I said to them sternly. "You know the fate which should await you. I am an officer of the British Secret Police: in the ordinary way I should take you at once to the police station, and by the time you came out of prison—well, you are both old and I doubt if you ever would come out. But I want to tell you this; we know all about this miserable plot you have been hiding. Are you fools to think that the British are asleep? You who live in Gibraltar might have warned your fellows in Spain." ⁶⁷

"You are fortunate beyond your deserts. If I had my way, you would go to the imprisonment you so richly deserve; but higher policy has decided against that. There are strange things happening in Spain, and the British Government has no desire to add further complications. This is what will happen to you, then: you will collect your passports and your money and a suitcase of your personal belongings; you will walk before me to the frontier at La Linea. You will remember that my revolver is always in my pocket, will you not? You will also remember that there are always police within call, and that any attempt to escape will land you in the police station. You will cross the frontier at La Linea, but even there your movement is not at an end. At the frontier British jurisdiction ceases, but not its influence. If you stay at La Linea for so much as an hour, if you have any contact whatsoever with your companions in this plot—well, it will be the worse for you! I warn you that someone will be watching you always. There is an autobus from La Linea at noon to Malaga: you will go to Malaga, and you will stay there. Is that understood?"

They agreed that it was understood.

"And be quite certain of this," I persisted, "that if you have any communication with the people who have employed you, or if you are concerned by another jot or tittle in this fantastic plot, then there is only one reward for you—not imprisonment but death. Think this over well. And now come along."

They vowed by all they held sacred that they would do exactly as I said. Had they been the young, ardent

Fascists of Salamanca, naturally I would have taken no notice of their word, but these two were merely hirelings, and were obviously and thoroughly scared. Even if by some mischance they did communicate with their fellows, the only real information they could give was that a British Secret Police Officer disguised as a gypsy had captured the cache of revolvers. There are quite a lot of gypsies in Southern Spain! In any case, I calculated that the time had come when I could lay down that part for ever.

But first I insisted that I should see my own funeral. Having conducted the captives over the frontier and sent Mitza after them to see that they took the 'bus to Malaga, I hurried back to the port and took the ferry across the bay. I must say that my Communist friends did me really proud: the hearse was covered with the trappings of a Spanish funeral, and the horses bore noble plumes. I had no details of their arrangements, but found that it was a real funeral—they had sought out the body of a man who had died perfectly naturally, and had persuaded the relatives to allow them to use it. I forgot to enquire, but I suspect that the family must have had the Communist sympathies, for otherwise I cannot envisage any Spanish family participating in such a hoax, even if the persuasion were financial. Funerals in Spain are very important ceremonies, second only, as occasions for emotional outbursts and feasting, to weddings.

Naturally the Communists made the occasion an excuse for propaganda. It was a saint's day, so no one was at work: hundreds of people were in the streets, and

hundreds of Communists marched in the wake of the procession. At the cemetery inflammatory speeches were made—even Mestas himself lost all trace of pedantry as he fumed against the murderers who had removed from their midst an English comrade. He gave me a marvellous character, and chronicled a list of my activities which, had my official friends heard them, would have made their eyebrows rise until they touched their hair.

After the funeral ceremony, however, I was interested to notice that the procession marched onwards, instead of returning to the town. I had had no opportunity of speaking to Mestas or his lieutenants—I had not thought it wise to expose myself freely, in spite of my disguise.

Half a mile beyond the cemetery, however, fifteen or twenty lorries were parked. Without orders, the processionists scrambled aboard. Naturally I followed suit—it was obvious that there had been developments in the last twenty-four hours of which I had no knowledge.

I was in some difficulty. If I asked outright where we were going, I might be suspected as a spy and slung out. Even as it was, I noticed one or two of the men looking at me suspiciously, for gypsies are seldom encountered in Communist circles. Before we moved off, however, I was relieved to see Mestas detailing his committee men, one to each lorry. Fortunately, the man who came to take charge of my particular vehicle was one of the men to whom I had spoken on the evening of my 'death.'

The Communists rather naturally struck up the Internationale as the string of lorries sped along the northward road. They sang heartily if not tunefully,

and in their pre-occupation I was able to sidle up to the leader and reveal myself to him. Although he knew of my disguise, he had to admit that he would never have recognised me.

"But what is happening—where are we going?" I demanded, breaking in on his exclamations of amazement.

"Ah, things have happened since you left!" he said. "One of our comrades is a waiter in a café, and this morning he heard something very significant. The Fascists have established a camp in the woods behind San Roque. We had heard of it before, but had taken no great notice—they gave it out that it was just a Summer Camp for physical training; but it appears it is really the headquarters of the plot of which you spoke. We are now going to raid it and break it up."

"But are there enough of you?" I queried. "You know these Fascists are a tough lot."

"Oh, we ought to be enough," he said. "We are fighting for a cause, and they are hirelings."

"I am not so certain about that!" I contradicted. "In fact, I don't believe it—they also are fighting for a cause. It may be a wrong one, but they are fighting for it. Are you all armed?"

"Some of us, not many," he said.

But when I reflected on that point, I argued that it was improbable that the Fascists would be heavily armed either—at least a hundred and seventy-three of them would be lacking revolvers!

"And what is your plan?" I asked.

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"We are going to wait until dusk, when they will be sitting at their evening meal. We shall rush out from the woods upon them, and they will be confused."

"And then?"

"And then we shall beat them up and destroy their camp and take their arms. We shall take their leaders prisoners—and hold them."

"Ah, if you can do that, then the job will be done," I agreed, for I was quite convinced that without Castillo's compelling spirit this plot would lose ninety per cent of its forcefulness. "Nevertheless, I should like to have a say in your tactical scheme; pass the word to Mestas as soon as you can."

Alas, the opportunity never arose. It was the maddest attack I ever saw. After passing through San Roque, the lorries plunged into hilly country, following a rough road. Suddenly, and apparently unexpectedly, we came in sight of the camp, and when I saw its considerable extent, I was concerned—if it were fully occupied, we were considerably outnumbered.

Nevertheless, if we had halted a mile or two back, and had spread ourselves out and waited for the darkness, the attack might have succeeded. As it was, although dusk had fallen, the Fascists had ample warning of our approach as, yelling furiously, the Communists ran across the two or three hundred yards of intervening ground. Most of the Fascists were sitting about on the grass, awaiting their evening meal. Fortunately, not suspecting attack, the greater part of them were unarmed.

They had no time to return to their tents to collect such arms as they possessed before we were upon them. It was a short and confused battle which would have given great delight in rural Ireland. Occasionally a few shots were fired, but for the most part the medley of struggling humanity made a revolver almost as dangerous to friend as to foe.

It was fairly obvious, however, that the principal idea of the raid was unlikely to be fulfilled. The Fascists had the advantage of numbers, and quite definitely they were not fighting like hirelings. I hung about for a few minutes on the edge of the struggling mass. Then, collecting half a dozen men who were wandering about in that confused state which made them ready to obey any order so long as it was an order, I led them to the long lines of tents. Fortunately the weather had been dry for weeks, and a match applied to each tent soon produced rows of blazing ruins. My intervention, too, had the effect of breaking up the mass struggle around the camp fire. Little groups of Fascists broke away from the battle to protect the camp: dozens of Communists pursued them, and within a few minutes the mass combat had dissolved into twenty small but furious battles.

I tried to keep clear of the fighting—not from cowardice, but because I wanted to achieve my end. So far as the destruction of the tents was concerned I was very successful. By this time the camp fire was deserted—the scene of combat had transferred itself to the living quarters of the camp. Taking a couple of burning brands from the fire, therefore, I rushed towards three marquees of size

which were fairly obviously the administrative headquarters of the camp. Immediately they burst into flames; even if a few individual tents escaped harm, I could at least claim that the camp was destroyed.

But where was Castillo? If I could have got him, I would have cared little about the progress of the fight—I might even have deserted my allies, borrowing one of their lorries to get my prisoner away. But I saw no sign of him: I ran from group to group, staring in the semi-darkness into the furious faces of the fighting Fascists. In the confusion it was impossible to be certain, but I was reasonably convinced that Castillo was not among his men.

Then one of the Fascists took a leaf out of my own book, and put brain above brawn. Slipping away from the fight, he ran across the open space to the line of lorries. It is almost as easy to fire a lorry as a tent, and before the infuriated Communists could intervene half their vehicles were blazing merrily. Even then they could only save the rest at the expense of breaking off the fight. Some of them rushed to the surviving lorries; others maybe thought that the retreat had been sounded, and followed them. The Fascists followed with a yell of triumph. There was more furious fighting around the lorries. The Communists evidently knew that they had lost the action and were fighting with their backs to the wall; the Fascists recoiled before their frantic onslaught. Some leader among them, with considerable tact, called them off, ordering them to the defence of the camp, to save what they could from the flames. In the temporary

respite the Communists beat a more or less dignified retreat, each lorry carrying twice its normal complement of men.

My readers may think me a coward when I confess that I had not struck a single blow during this fighting. But now, maybe, I can atone—for when the lorries drove off in retreat, I remained behind. True, I hid myself among the undergrowth of the wood surrounding the clearing in which the camp was sited. Later, when confusion had subsided somewhat, I would emerge. I was getting tired of this miserable business, which I thought I had killed when I blew in the Gibraltar tunnel. I was determined to get Castillo at all costs; then I would know that the plot was dead.

By the light of burning brands I saw the Fascists searching the ground, the scene of battle. A dozen men were lying about groaning, but three were dead.

(Incidentally, it is a commentary on the acute tragedy of Spain that only three English newspapers so much as reported this combat in which three men lost their lives. Even these gave it no more than half an inch at the bottom of a column. ‘In an affray between Communists and Fascists at San Roque last night, two Communists and one Fascist were killed and a dozen injured.’ You can scarcely blame the newspapers; in those unhappy days similar reports came in from Spain every day; news is only news when it is unusual.)

I kept a sharp eye on the road from San Roque. In the near distance, by the light of the camp-fire, I could discern signs of intense activity. The rapid flames had

now been extinguished—or, more probably, had burned themselves out. The camp-fire itself appeared to serve as a first aid station, and dozens of men were tending the hurts of others.

I felt ill-pleased, yet I ought not to have grumbled. It is but seldom that fate gives a man a hundred per cent of success, and I had had my full share of fortune. My complaint was that the Communist attack, on which I had set such store, had been so shockingly muddled. Their tactical ideas would have disgraced a Boy Scout, and in the unhappy weeks that followed I was not surprised when thousands of these men rushed to a gallant but ineffectual and unnecessary death. If I could have lectured Mestas and his staff for but a single hour on the tactics of surprise attack!

However, there would be no assault on Gibraltar to-morrow, that was certain. If I could only seize Castillo, there would be no attack at all. But where was he?

I had no plan, but I had a revolver. I was prepared to kill him, if necessary—in those days of strife one more violent death scarcely seemed of account. I ought to have been more patient, perhaps, but I believe that nothing more than sheer accident led to my undoing. Four men left the camp-fire, evidently to gather fresh fuel. Approaching the wood, they turned abruptly at the last moment; I had taken up a new position, lying under a bush—and one of the men actually trod on me as he stooped to pick up a dead branch.

He trod on my right hand, which was temporarily numbed. Long before I could draw my revolver they

were upon me. Had I been a Bulldog Drummond I would of course have made short work of such meagre odds as four to one. Actually the fight was over in about ten seconds, for one of the Fascists clouted me soundly with the branch he was carrying.

I was not unconscious, but lost the use of my limbs, and they dragged and carried me to the camp.

“A spy! We have caught a spy!” they cried, and a great group of men clustered round me.

“A spy! Why, he’s only a gypsy!” I heard one say, contemptuously.

“Anyway, he’s got to explain what he was doing here,” one of my captors declared. “Answer me!” he ordered. “Why were you hiding there?”

I couldn’t answer. My head was throbbing, and my brain wouldn’t work.

“Answer, damn you!” he shouted.

“Just a minute, just a minute!” Another man pushed his way through the crowd; a young man—I found later that he was a medical student who had been busy since the fight attending to the numerous injured men. He knelt down beside me—for I was unable to stand—and flashed a torch over me. “Don’t be a fool,” he said sharply to my threatening captor. “This man can’t answer—you hit him too hard for that. Leave him to me.”

Someone held his torch while he bandaged my head. His fingers were gentle, yet he hurt furiously. Apparently my neck was torn as well as my head—I felt the gentle pressure of cotton wool and the sharp pang of disinfectant.

He went back to his other charges. No one made a move to bind me, but I knew that I could not escape—the strength had gone from me. Yet I was not unduly pessimistic about my prospects. At a hectic moment like this, anyone might be a spy. Doubtless by the cooler morning I would have become 'only a gypsy.'

I was near enough to the fire to draw some of its warmth. Men were sleeping all about me—three quarters of the tents had been utterly destroyed. My head ached like a fury; I thought no more of escape, but only of sleep, which would not come to me.

In the early hours of the morning I heard the sound of an approaching car. The men about me slept on, in the after-weariness of excitement. Suddenly I heard Castillo's voice.

He was questioning his friends—short, jerky, rasping questions which betrayed his fury. I could do no more than to raise my head a few inches from the ground, but by the light of the fire's red embers I saw the angry consternation on his face as he surveyed the wreckage of his camp, the pivot of his dreams. He strode over to the spot where the marquees had stood—now pathetic heaps of black ash, still smoking. Then he passed out of my sight and hearing.

It was well after dawn when there was any stir in the camp. Then I saw Castillo again, moving from one to the other, asking questions everywhere, trying to elucidate the mystery of this attack.

"I heard them shouting: 'Avenge the Englishman!'" said one.

"And I!" added another.

"I wonder!" Castillo said. "That cursed Englishman has been my nightmare. He was buried yesterday, but even in his death he comes back to thwart us."

He passed on, till he came to one of my captors. I heard this man boasting profusely of his prowess.

"Where is this prisoner?" asked Castillo.

They brought him over to me, but he gave me no more than a cursory glance.

"Oh, he's only a gypsy! Gypsies aren't Communists—they've got more sense. He was probably hanging about to see what he could pick up. I'll attend to him later."

I was cheered by his decision: hesitantly I tested my limbs but found them still appallingly weak and uncontrolled. My hands were swollen, and my legs seemed wooden and useless, making no response to the twitching of my muscles.

My head still throbbed with a fierce ache, and I welcomed the young medical student as he made his round of his patients. Cleverly he cut away the bandages and prepared new dressings. At the same time he gave directions to another man, who was giving self-attention to wounds in the leg. Suddenly I heard a shouted exclamation.

"Fetch the Chief!" he called to a man near-by. I wondered what his alarm meant, but I had no idea that it concerned me.

Castillo came up, drawn and haggard—like Napoleon must have looked the day after Waterloo.

"What is it?" he asked, in terse accents.

"Look at this man!" said my 'doctor.' "Last night I dressed his wounds, almost in the dark. I cleaned the flesh with disinfectant—*look, where I swabbed him, his skin has turned white!*"

Castillo lost his stare of detachment, and his keen eyes looked hard at me. I saw a sudden dawning of unbelieving astonishment—he gave a cry of amazement. And I knew that I was done for.

"Quickly!" he ordered. "Swab him all over—his face, I mean."

Pads of cotton wool swamped in methylated spirits sponged my face. Another liquid followed—something stronger, but I could not distinguish its smell. Then the medical man stepped back, and Castillo faced me again.

"So, Señor Newman, you were *not* buried at Algeciras yesterday!" he said.

I must say that he took it very well. For a moment I thought that his fury would overcome him, and that he would finish me on the spot. Then he controlled himself gallantly.

"Well, I will give you credit!" he said. "But there is only one way in which you can pay in part for the harm you have done me."

I tried to speak, but my voice seemed weak and far away, and my brain refused to form coherent sentences.

"What does this mean? Is he shamming?" Castillo demanded.

"Oh no," said the doctor. "He has had a nasty knock—a weaker man might have died. If you want to question him, you'll have to wait for some hours."

"Very well, I'll wait—for I *do* want to question him," Castillo answered grimly.

Now an armed guard was mounted over me. They need not have bothered—I could scarcely have escaped even if I had had the opportunity. The rising sun brought gathering strength to me, until the flies became a torture as they busied themselves about my blood-clotted bandages.

By noon my brain was clear, though the muscles of my body were still unresponsive. Four men carried me to a tent in which Castillo sat. I could not stand, but flopped on the floor, resting my back against a box.

"Well, Señor Newman, what have you to tell me?" Castillo began.

"Quite a lot, Señor Castillo," I replied. For I had decided that my purpose would be best served by telling him the truth, or most of it—if I revealed to him the complete wreckage of his plans, surely he would abandon any mad ideas he might still hold.

First I told him who I was, and how and why I had entered into the affair.

"I owe you one apology," he said. "I did not know that you were so disinterested!"

Then I explained briefly how I had discovered the Gibraltar end of the tunnel and had blocked it up.

"I have naturally heard of that," he commented. He did not seem very perturbed. I recalled my previous impression—that he had favoured his own plan of assault rather than Vicente's diversion, which to my mind was by far the more dangerous of the two.

"But it does not persuade you to abandon the idea?" I suggested.

"No. Why should it?" he asked. "That was one of our plans—we have others."

"If you are thinking of the store of revolvers in Gibraltar, I should not rely on that," I said gently.

"What!" he cried. "Have you been there too?"

"Señor Castillo," I went on, "let me say this. I like you: I admire your energy and enthusiasm—they only fail in their direction. Remember that, although I am now your prisoner, I could at one time have 'removed' you, and could have had you assassinated a dozen times since. After all, it is only by accident that we are not lying side by side, with Vicente, in the garden of Salamanca. So will you not believe me when I tell you that your scheme is simply impracticable? It was hopeless from the beginning, but now it would be a farce. Like too many people to-day, you under-estimated the British."

"It seems to me that I made my mistake when I under-estimated you!" he said.

"But I am British—I am actually a part of the country and system you despise."

"Yet I understood that your intervention was un-official."

"Of course it was!" I cried. "But that is how Britain works. We are a race of individualists—we do not work at our best in massed battalions. My country depends not merely on sailors and soldiers and police, but on every man or woman. It is part of our national character, bred into us. Southern races have seldom understood us. You

see a British achievement as a series of fortuitous circumstances, a triumph as a fluke. But, believe me, it isn't! You don't understand our mentality—you pay too much attention to words. Because Baldwin talks humbly, you despise him, and because Mussolini brags, you honour him. Yet Baldwin is the bigger and better man of the two.

"Now, surely I have shown you that you cannot succeed. You have not merely the armed might of an empire against you, but brains. You *cannot* win. So why try? I swear to you that this has been my only object in interfering—to prevent the *attempt*, because of the complications which would have followed."

"So you feared complications?"

"Of course I did," I replied.

"And you would have given much to avoid them?"

"Of course. Ah—now I see your line of thought. It is Baldwin and Mussolini again. Because I feared the complications you see in my admission a confession of weakness. You are wrong—it is a *profession of strength*. Let me put it this way, if I can do it without offence. You wished to capture Gibraltar for political purposes. Britain would certainly have retaliated—she could not accept such an insult and remain a great nation. You misjudge what you call her 'weakness'—her policy is to avoid or prevent the insult. That is strength, not weakness. The insult once given, she would act—you may take my word for that! It is highly probable that other interested powers, who have mis-read Britain like yourself, would join in the dispute. We know that a local war is in these perverted days impossible—a general conflagration is inevitable.

So, to achieve your political object, you are prepared to plunge Europe into war. Have I put it fairly?"

"Except that I do not believe that England would do anything except talk."

"Then you are utterly and absolutely wrong," I assured him. "Anyway, suppose I am right—suppose England would act, with the consequences I have named. Even then, would you take such a risk, merely to rally Spain to the Fascist cause?"

"Yes, I would—my cause comes before anything England or Europe might do!" And some of the men in the tent murmured their approval of their leader's word.

"Your words sound strong, but one day you'll realise that they are weak," I said. "You would provoke untold misery by the blow for your cause, while I would suffer almost anything to prevent the blow. Well, obviously we are too far apart to argue. I return to practical considerations—I must persuade you that your plan is simply impossible!"

I went over the old ground from half a dozen different angles, till I thought I had convinced him. But the fanatic mind should not be judged by normal standards, and I was not so successful as I had supposed.

"Well, there seems to remain only one problem," I concluded. "That is—what are you going to do with me? The solution is easy—if, as I hope, you have abandoned your attack, there is no reason why I should not return to Gibraltar."

"I am afraid you will not return to Gibraltar just now—if ever," he replied. "*I have not yet abandoned my plan to attack.*"

CHAPTER XV

AS I LAY in the shade of a tent, I was mentally weary. This business seemed to have no end. When I had wrecked the tunnel, I had thought that my little battle was over. Now new complications appeared at every turn—not events of drama, but just sheer pig-headedness. I have often sneered at the conventional mystery story, so gloriously and consciously untrue to life, but now I longed for its sleek, easy mounting to its climax, with a swift denouement in the last two pages.

My body at least was recovering. After my futile argument with Castillo, I had walked a few hesitant steps, relieved to find that my muscles were returning to control. Then my 'medical attendant' took charge of me, dressed my wounds again, and made me rest. The actual abrasions on my head and neck proved on close examination to be superficial, he said—it was the after-effects of concussion which were troubling me.

I rested comfortably, till a group of Fascists joined those on watch over me. Quite a number of them had 'listened in' to my argument with their chief, apparently, and wanted to continue it. I was not in the mood. Since Castillo had proved so insensitive to argument and advice, in my weariness I felt like letting him go to hell—let him attack Gibraltar, and see what happened!

So I responded without verve to the protestations of the excited chorus about me. One or two of them were frankly derisive, and one was positively abusive.

"You see, the chief was right!" he claimed. "England is just a bubble—prick it, and all is over. Look at her gallant representative here! So full of brave words an hour ago, but now that he has failed—now that he has come across someone who has called his bluff, he is the pricked bubble!"

His taunts of cowardice did not seem to me to be very fair—after all, I had put up quite a good, single-handed show against their entire organisation. I would have ignored him, but the sniggers of the rest annoyed me—you expect an occasional braggart, but there ought to be a leavening of sane men in a crowd.

"The chief was right!" he declared again (I restrained an insane desire to laugh outright—his opening remark was so reminiscent of Low's Colonel Blimp). "When we have taken Gibraltar, England will appeal to the League of Nations—no more!"

"Don't talk rubbish," I said sharply, my patience almost exhausted.

"Do you think England will do any dirty work herself?" he cried. "No. Maybe she could get some of her niggers to attack Gibraltar for her, but she would not do it herself. She is known as a decadent power. One real man, like Mussolini, can defy her—because she could not persuade other nations to do her dirty work."

He turned for my retort, but I ignored him. Yet I felt that I was having the worst of the encounter. In its

beginning the argument had been serious, but now they were all laughing at my expense.

"Look at the English during the last war," he taunted. "It is well known that they avoided all the fighting themselves, and paid the French and the Russians to do it for them."

"So that explains our million dead!" I commented.

"Yes, a million dead—no doubt shot in the back while running away!"

By this time I was sitting up on my camp bed, and his last insult was past bearing. I had gone beyond the limits of reasoning—I forgot my position as a captive—I forgot all my own arguments. I stood up abruptly, and hit him.

He staggered backwards, but then came at me with a rush. Maybe he had been playing with me—had deliberately taunted me to combat. Had I been fit I would have laughed at his attack. Yet, as many a man can testify, a moment of emergency brings its own strength. I was always too clumsy to be a boxer, but I can hit, and have fourteen stones of bone and muscle to back my punch.

He took it on his jaw, as he rushed at me without guard. He collapsed abruptly in his tracks. His companions stared at him in silent amazement—one minute he was a raging fury of movement, now lying helpless on the ground. He was not a pretty sight: like a fool, his tongue was between his teeth as he ran towards me, and ugly streams of blood trickled from his mouth.

After my moment of strength I felt weak again: I subsided clumsily on the camp bed.

So

“Take him away!” I ordered. “That is a little present from a wounded Englishman. When I am fit I will come back and bring the rest.”

They carried him off, and left me in peace. And in my weariness I was suddenly consoled—probably my angry blow had done far more good than my more logical argument. Maybe it would convey the impression that England would *not* be content with an appeal to the League of Nations!

But an hour later I overheard a scrap of conversation which made me forget all my troubles and the grave dangers which, I felt, lay ahead—dangers to me personally as well as to the peace of Europe, for if the Fascists attacked Gibraltar and failed (as assuredly they would!) my own life would not be worth a peseta. Defeat must find a scapegoat.

I have grumbled at the anti-climax in my story—at the leisurely manner in which it refused to complete itself. Yet its denouement, I was to find, was to be just as rapid and complete as that of the conventional mystery novel at which I had sneered.

In a neighbouring tent two young Fascists were talking. For half an hour they had been discussing cars—they were both mechanically minded, apparently, and their discussion of intricate details wearied me. But one sentence made the blood quicken in my veins like a charge of electricity.

“Talking of veterans,” one of them said, “that old Ford you used to have wasn’t in it with what I saw in San Roque this morning. It was a Hispano-Suiza—I swear it must have dated from 1910.”

“No!”

“Yes. But it could move, still. A gypsy girl was driving it. You never saw such an old crock—the car, I mean, not the girl—but she must have been getting a good seventy kilometres an hour out of it.”

So Mitza was in San Roque! Mitza had traced me! I scarcely paused to ask how. From the defeated Communists she would have got the story of the ‘battle,’ and would find that I had not returned. That would be quite enough for loyal Mitza!

What would she do? *I had never taken away from her the note I had given her in the tunnel—addressed to my friend on the Governor’s staff.*

I lay back quite happily. There was no need to think any more. Mitza would find him, and he would do the thinking. I had got to the stage when I didn’t care if he rolled up officially, backed by an army of Civil Guards.

But he didn’t. I lay on my bed, half-dozing in the reaction after excitement. Suddenly I heard voices in Castillo’s tent, a dozen yards away.

“Very well, bring them in!” Castillo said.

There was an interval of ten minutes or more, as if visitors were being conducted from the outlying patrols of the camp.

Then: “Señor Castillo?”—*the voice of my friend.*

“I am Señor Castillo.”

“My Spanish is poor, Señor Castillo. Do you speak English or French?”

“French, señor.”

"Excellent!" said my friend, switching over to that language. "Well, Señor Castillo, I am a British officer from Gibraltar. You hold another British officer prisoner here. I have come to take him back."

"Oh!"

"Yes. I might have come officially, of course, but my friend would have preferred that I should come like this. He had an exaggerated fear, in my opinion, of the potential consequences of your projected attack on Gibraltar—an attack, señor, for which I assure you we are well prepared. So I have come privately, for his sake. But I have left instructions that unless I am back in Gibraltar by five o'clock—well, things will begin to move."

"Well, señor?"

"Well?" My friend sounded rather disconcerted. "Well—what else is there to say?"

"A good deal. Your arguments, like those of your friend, assume that I have given up the attack on Gibraltar. But that is not the case."

"What?" This in a roar.

"I regret that I shall have to detain you here," Castillo continued.

"But I have warned you—if I do not return—"

"Yes, yes, señor, I heard you. But we are not to be moved by trifles. One man's safety—one man's life—means so little where the salvation of a nation's soul is concerned."

"But—but—"

"There is no argument," said the Fascist chief.

“One moment, Señor Castillo!” Another voice—and my heart leaped as I heard it. *Marshall’s voice!*

How had he got here? Of course, I had written to him before and after my adventure in the tunnel. I could just imagine him at the Yard, straining at the leash to get into the fray. Was he here officially, or had he drawn on those few days of leave he had in hand?

“One moment, Señor Castillo!” Marshall continued, in his slow and precise French. “Have you seen the newspapers this afternoon?”

“No, señor, I have not. Our supplies are rather irregular, and we are disorganised after the affray last night. But what have——”

“Yesterday Señor Calvo Sotelo was murdered by the Communists,” said Marshall. He spoke without emphasis, for French was a very foreign language to him, yet the sentence was tense with drama.

“What! Sotelo!”

“Yes. He was taken yesterday from his house by Communists disguised as Civil Guards. This morning his body was discovered.” He paused for a few moments, obviously with effect. “Well, Señor Castillo, this alters the outlook, does it not?”

“This is not a trick—you are sure of this?” he cried.

“Here is a newspaper—see for yourself.” And I heard the sharp crunch of the paper as his excited hands grasped it.

“It does not need intelligence like yours to realise what this means,” Marshall continued, smoothly but incisively.

"Let me think! Let me think!" said Castillo—half a groan.

"May I help you?" he suggested. "Shall we see if my reasoning agrees with yours? All the world knows that for weeks Spain has been hesitating on the brink of civil war. The weakness of the Government and the reaction of the Right parties are two incompatible factors. Yet a revolt must catch the imagination of the people—it must have an outstanding occasion, whatever its cause. The murder of Señor Sotelo is the kind of spark which may easily set Spain alight. Do you find my argument sound, Señor Castillo?"

"Yes," he muttered, after a hesitant pause. "Sotelo! Yes, this tyranny cannot be endured any longer. The moment for action must be near."

"So, in that case——" and I could visualise his intriguing smile.

"Señor, I congratulate you!" said Castillo. "It is not always that one meets an Englishman whose political perception is so acute. You are quite right. Whatever I think of England and Gibraltar, I am not going to embroil myself—and Spain—at the very moment when the reckoning with red anarchy is at hand."

"So, Señor Castillo——"

"Señor, your friend returns with you to Gibraltar—on one condition."

"And that is?"

"Merely silence, for a little while. In your talk of this reckoning which the murder of Sotelo must bring to a head, you have voiced ideas hitherto only—well,

ideas. I do not disguise—I cannot disguise—from you that the murder of Sotelo will be avenged—it must be avenged. But it may take some days to prepare."

"I see. Well, I agree—our talk to-day is private; the internal troubles of Spain are no affair of ours."

"That is precisely the correct attitude, señor," Castillo said. "I shall not require your silence for long. When we move, the red rabble will soon be swept from Spain!"

(I had a deep-seated conviction, even at that moment, that he was an optimist!)

"Well, I am glad this affair at least has arranged itself," Marshall said—the phrase sounds awkward in English, but flows in French. "And now—"

"I understand perfectly, señor!" He called to my guards, and a moment later I was with Marshall.

I forgot my weakness as I gazed into those firm eyes and that cool, composed face. Marshall was born a Yorkshireman, but he seemed quite at home in this clearing in Spain. I saw a wave of amusement flash across his eyes—I must have looked a comic sight, my face white and my neck brown—to be replaced by a look of concern, as he noticed my hurts.

I shook hands gravely with Castillo. He had been a terrific nuisance to me, and I disagreed heartily with his creed, yet I found it impossible to hate him. Castillo will never attack Gibraltar now—he was one of the early casualties in the Spanish blood-bath.

Marshall took my arm, and I walked slowly across the stretch of grass. We reached a waiting car—and Mitza was inside it.

We drove rapidly to Gibraltar, and I was promptly put to bed! A doctor arrived, and injected something—and I slept. When I awoke, I felt marvellously better—which was scarcely surprising seeing that I had slept the clock round twice.

Clean and dressed again, I found Marshall awaiting me. “Where is Mitza?” was my first question.

“With her own people. She refused to stay here—and maybe she was right. We are meeting her in the morning—I have arranged a rendezvous. Gosh, that girl’s got some guts, old man. You do seem to find ‘em.”

He was right there. Few women have entered my life, but most of them have been queens of their sex—intelligent and loyal.

I was concerned about Mitza, and showed it.

“Yes, you’ll have to make up your mind,” Marshall agreed. “And what about Margaret?”

“I’m not unhappy about Margaret. She knows me, and knows my job. She knew when she took me on that she wasn’t getting engaged to a suburban grocer. I’m quite sure Margaret will understand—I don’t see how I could have acted in any other way. Certainly I wouldn’t have succeeded without Mitza. I must have a long talk with her.”

“Hold yourself in,” he advised. “No hurry for a day or so—you may have lost more strength than you know.”

“But how did you get here?” I asked—in my excitement I had forgotten to put the first obvious question.

“Well, did you think I should stay away when I got your letter?” Marshall asked. “I had to come, if it were only to put a tombstone over the Gibraltar tunnel.”

"And how did you get to the Fascist camp?"

"That was the only part chance played in the affair. Naturally I came to your friend's here to enquire after you—and Mitza came here, too, when she had traced you in the camp. The rest was easy."

"But was it? I mean, I understand now how you got at me, but one thing puzzles me. How did you come to make such forceful deductions from the murder of this man Sotelo. That sort of business isn't quite up your street, is it? I never imagined you as such a keen and penetrating student of foreign affairs."

"I'm not," Marshall grinned. "That was Mason. I 'phoned him to-day just before we set out—I say, this inter-country 'phone is a wonderful thing—quicker than getting a trunk call in England. I didn't know what we were butting into, and I wanted Mason to know, so that he should be ready to pull strings if things went wrong. I'd never heard of this Sotelo fellow. Mason said, 'Whatever you do, do it quickly. This morning, we have just had the news, Señor Sotelo has been found murdered. Sotelo is a very prominent Right leader. In the present state of tension in Spain, his murder may be the spark which sets the country alight. And if an armed revolt does begin—well, in a civil war panic is never far away, and both sides murder their prisoners indiscriminately. So get Newman away from these fanatics quickly, before the row starts.' He gave me some more dope about Sotelo, and I reckon I used it quite well, eh?"

"It was most effective," I agreed. "I've been arguing with Castillo off and on for weeks, but you convinced

him in five minutes! I'll certainly give Mason full marks—evidently the Foreign Office isn't quite so dull as I thought it was."

At this point my friend broke in upon us, with many unnecessary apologies. There was a reception at Government House that evening, he explained—would we care to go?

"But I haven't any kit," I said.

"I have," he argued. "We can get a tailor to let out my dress jacket an inch."

"But what about you?"

"I shall be in mess kit."

"And you, Marshall?"

"I should like to go, of course. I shall have to raise togs, too—I came in a hurry, and by air. But you're sure you're strong enough?"

I reassured him. The doctor had camouflaged my wounds very cleverly with coloured sticking plaster, and a careful brushing of the hair rendered them invisible. We went to the reception—a glorious compromise between splendid dignity and homely friendliness. I knew many of the men present; there was dancing, and dozens of pretty girls. My friend's wife was once the belle of the Aldershot Command, and she took charge of me while her husband did his duty. We tired of the sultry ballroom, and walked in the shady gardens. I had not grumbled at my life as a gypsy, but a return to civilisation was not unpleasant.

Nevertheless, I was very concerned as I walked over to Catalan Bay the following morning. When I saw

Mitza I was exceedingly unhappy. The poor girl had lost her vivacious spirit—had obviously been crying; rare luxury for her.

“Well, Mitza, we have to decide what we are going to do, now that our task is complete,” I began, gently.

“There is no decision to make—it is made,” Mitza whispered.

“What do you mean?”

“I saw you last night: I climbed on to the wall. I saw you and a lady with all those grand people. I saw that you belonged there. Once I thought that you would belong to me again, for you have something of the Romany instinct within you—that I know. But when I saw you last night I knew that I was wrong. You would be happy with me for a little while, but not for ever. If I cannot make you happy, I do not want you—for I love you.”

“Mitza!” I put my arm about her, and kissed her. Yet I felt extremely small and miserable.

I confess to being relieved, too. No Englishman likes a scene with a woman, and I had been dreading my meeting with Mitza. I had anticipated storms of tears and fury. Mitza was a *naturelle*, a child of passion. It was true that I had only taken her for a temporary job: although my affection for her was far stronger than I could ever have known, it was mild compared with her stormy passion. Restraint is almost unknown in the gypsy code of conduct. Had Mitza flung herself upon me in fury I would never have been surprised. This sudden, quiet acceptance of the situation was unnatural, till I realised that it did but

reveal the depth of the poor girl's love for me. I have not felt so uneasy mentally for many a long year.

"But what will you do, Mitza?" I asked at length, fumbling for ideas.

"I shall go back to my people. You have given me the car—perhaps you will give me money to buy petrol for the journey."

"But what will happen when you go back to your tribe?" I persisted.

Mitza did not answer, but I knew that she must dread the prospect. A gypsy girl who loses her husband is scorned by the tribe, and can only look for a semi-slave existence as a general drudge for the camp.

"Just a minute, Mitza," I broke the silence. "I have something else to say. I haven't treated you fairly—"

"Yes, yes, you have," she cried. "You told me all this the night of our marriage. You told me about your señora—it was I who brought passion to you. I do not regret it—I have known some happy hours, which I shall always remember. But I do not belong to the world I saw last night, and you do not belong to mine. You *must* leave me, I know it."

"Mitza, you make me more ashamed. But now, let us be practical. I am not quite sure of Romany custom, but I have an idea. I want to talk to El Manco. Will you come with me?"

I would have sold the old Hispano-Suiza, but Mitza persisted that she wanted it as a memento. We travelled alone—I arranged a meeting with Marshall later. We found that El Manco had removed his camp to a coppice

near Tudela. I was careful to keep well away, and sent a message to him by a youth of the town.

There was no mistaking the warmth of his welcome—after all, were we not blood-brothers? He received Mitza with obvious affection.

After our greetings, he wanted to hear our story, and I gave him a summary of our adventures. Then I got to the point.

“And now, my brother, there is the question of Mitza.”

“Yes, there is the question of Mitza,” he agreed. “Of course, she will come back to my tribe.”

“You are willing?”

“Of course. That was understood between us. She is of my blood—she shall never starve while I am alive.”

“And yet I am not happy. I am not versed in Romany law, but will Mitza’s position be happy, returning like this, without a husband?”

“No one in my tribe shall ill-treat her while I am alive,” he protested: then added, rather sadly, “But, of course, I am a very old man.”

“Listen,” I said. “Here is an idea. If Mitza returns like this, apparently disgraced, she is almost an outcast. But suppose she were to return as a widow?”

“*Rom!*” cried Mitza.

“Oh, have no fear,” I consoled her. “But it would be quite easy: I have told you of my adventures—*was I not buried at Algeciras a week ago?* You can show a press cutting to prove it!”

“Ah, but that is ingenious!” said El Manco, delighted. “Yes, as a widow Mitza could return without question.”

"Could she marry again?" I asked—for I knew that the lot of an unmarried gypsy woman was not enviable, even if her honour were saved.

"Of course! Your marriage with her was no legal marriage—only by gypsy custom. If she returned as a cast-off woman she would be sneered at by the tribe because she was no longer *lacha*, and no man would marry a girl who is not virgin. But a widow is different, of course."

"Well, Mitza, it is for you to say," I turned to her. I didn't feel at all happy, but she sat sober and composed.

"I don't mind," she said. "Arrange it with El Manco as you will. I cannot have you, so it does not matter."

"And, after a while, you would like to marry again?"

"I am a woman. I could not live without love!"

"Listen, El Manco," I said, "I want Mitza to choose her own bridegroom—whatever she likes. There is no hurry—let her choose her man at will."

"That is rather difficult," he argued. "A widow cannot have a first choice, even if she is no more than seventeen."

"But Mitza can choose wherever she wishes," I persisted, "because I am putting up her dowry—two thousand pesetas!"

"What?" cried El Manco, jumping to his feet. "Did I hear aright? Did you say two thousand pesetas?"

"I did." It was a meagre reward for what Mitza had done for me, but sixty pounds is a colossal sum to a nomad gypsy.

"Why then, brother *gorgio*, you are right!" he exclaimed, his eyes shining with excitement. "With such a dowry Mitza can choose wherever she will."

Mitza turned to me, and the listless look had gone from her eyes.

"You would do so much for me?" she whispered.

"More than that, Mitza. No money can express my affection for you. I am sorry that, as I am 'dead,' I cannot come to dance at your wedding—but at least it shall be a merry one. El Manco, I shall leave another five hundred pesetas to see to that."

"What?" he cried again. "Mitza—you heard?"

"And I shall buy for Mitza a new frock, and golden earrings." They did not know that I was pacifying my conscience, and their unrestrained excitement aided the process. I charged El Manco that he would always send for me if Mitza wanted for anything. He scouted the idea that it was possible. A gypsy girl—a girl of his tribe—with a dowry of two thousand pesetas, could *never* want for anything.

The moment of parting came; and, despite my professed satisfaction at the arrangement, I felt small and mean. In a story a perfect rounding-off is possible in the last chapter, but in life you often have to choose between a variety of methods, none completely satisfactory. There was no perfect solution of my problem. I felt—well, there is no use in talking: you can guess how I felt.

Mitza looked at me as a dog looks at a faithless master. For a moment I anticipated a storm of tears.

"We shall meet again, often, Mitza," I whispered. "Every time I come to Spain, you shall leave your camp for a while, and come to see me."

The suggestion of reunion is the best antidote to the grief of parting. Mitza clung to me for a moment, and I

felt again that first grip of passion I had first known in the cave in Roncal. Then she slipped composedly into the driving seat of the ancient Hispano-Suiza.

I was alone. I was silent and subdued; a few hours later Marshall joined me, but he made no attempt to interrupt my thoughts. My sombre mood soon passed. When Marshall at last broke through the silence, he talked of the task I had just completed—recalled the thrills of success in a hazardous enterprise.

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I repeat, this is a tame finish. For the last hour I have been pacing my study, trying to recall some dramatic touch which would round off my story. I have failed. Drama does not develop on command.

My study ought to have inspired me, but it didn't. Its decorations are unconventional-oddments I have brought back from my adventures and travels—a crucifix which protected me in a vampire-haunted Carpathian village, a guzla I used to play in a Balkan gypsy orchestra, a dagger which very nearly took my life; and an Arab powder horn which once saved it. Dozens of things like these are strewn haphazard about the walls. But pride of place goes to the half of an earthenware plate which has been roughly broken in two—my 'marriage lines' with Mitza. Appropriately enough, it hangs over a picture of the Rock of Gibraltar.

